

# **Evaluating the Non-custodial Parent Choices Program in Texas:**

## **Literature Review, Early Implementation Results and Preliminary Impact Analysis Plan**

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Executive Summary .....	v
I. Introduction .....	1
The Choices Program Overview .....	1
The NCP Choices Program in Brief.....	2
The NCP Choices Program Model .....	3
Research Questions.....	4
Research Approach .....	5
Organization of the Report.....	5
II. Review of Literature on Non-custodial Parents .....	6
Background.....	6
The Significance of Child Support .....	6
Reasons for Noncompliance .....	9
Mistrust and Suspicion .....	9
Informal Supports .....	10
Disputes with the Custodial Parent.....	10
Lack of Financial Resources.....	10
Enhanced Child Support Enforcement.....	12
III. Early Implementation Analysis.....	16
The NCP Choices Program Model .....	16
NCP Choices Participant Flow .....	19
Site Descriptions: El Paso and Galveston/Brazoria Counties.....	22
Demographic Profiles .....	22
Program Profiles .....	23
Early Implementation Findings.....	25
Program Background and Design.....	26
NCP Choices Service Delivery.....	27
Resources.....	28
Services Provided .....	28
Community Partnerships .....	29
Labor Market .....	29
Initial Program Assessment .....	30
Preliminary Observations.....	30

IV. Preliminary Impact Analysis Plan .....	32
Research Questions .....	32
Comparison Group Design .....	34
True Experiment .....	34
Quasi-Experiment .....	34
Comparison Group Selection .....	35
True Experiment – Random Assignment .....	36
Quasi-Experimental Comparison Group Selection .....	37
Administrative Data Sources .....	42
Outcomes to be Measured .....	42
Period of Study .....	43
Identifier Issues.....	43
Agencies Supplying Administrative Data .....	43
Analyses to be Performed .....	46
Descriptive Statistics .....	46
Net Effect Estimation .....	46
Specification of Statistical Measures.....	47
Subgroup Analysis.....	50
Caveats and Limitations of Analysis .....	50
Other Research Components.....	52
References.....	54
Appendix A List of Key NCP Choices Contacts .....	A-1
Appendix B NCP Choices Project Field Interview Guide.....	B-1

## **List of Tables**

Table 1. Selected Features of the NCP Sites and Texas .....	23
Table 2: Research Questions and Expected NCP Choices Effects .....	34
Table 3: Specific Outcomes to be Analyzed.....	42
Table 4. Example of Impact Report Tables .....	47

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1. NCP Choices Program Participant Flow .....	21
Figure 2. Local workforce Development Board Map.....	25

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## **Executive Summary**

The Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) has partnered with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) on a demonstration project referred to as the Non-custodial Parent Choices Initiative (or NCP Choices). The project links IV-D courts responsible for child support issues, OAG child support staff, and local workforce development boards to encourage workforce development of unemployed and/or underemployed non-custodial parents (NCPs) with unpaid child support orders, and whose child is either currently receiving public assistance or has previously received public assistance.

The Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin has been contracted to analyze the early implementation of the NCP Choices project in two sites, and to develop an impact analysis plan.

The existing literature on child support enforcement indicates that although child support can be an important source of income in aiding single parent households to escape from poverty, receipt of child support among public assistance families remains low. Chief among the reasons for this trend are that many non-custodial parents (NCPs) are unable to meet their financial obligations due to unemployment or underemployment. Evaluations of previous programs designed to engage low-income NCPs in workforce programs often suffered from low enrollment (for voluntary programs), as well as implementation and service coordination challenges. Evidence suggests, however, that mandatory programs with “swift and certain consequences” for non-participation can help to alleviate enrollment problems. Should these problems be overcome, additional research evidence suggests that low-income NCPs, if successfully engaged in workforce services, can better meet their child support obligations.

The process analysis focuses on the early implementation of NCP Choices in El Paso and Galveston/Brazoria Counties in late summer, 2005. The NCP Choices model is straightforward: noncompliant NCPs are given the choice of paying their child support, participating in workforce services, or going to jail. The primary distinguishing features of NCP Choices are mandatory participation and clear choices—pay, play or pay the consequences.

The flow of participants varies somewhat by site, but the key elements generally consist of the following:

- OAG identifies NCPs on its caseload that are noncompliant with their child support payments, whose children either are or have been on welfare, and who also reside in the designated pilot workforce service areas.
- The IV-D Court, which is responsible for child support enforcement in Texas, sets an enforcement docket for the identified NCPs.
- OAG staff prepares consent orders, or modified probation orders.
- NCPs either sign the consent order to participate and complete the Choices program, make the requisite child support payments, or go to jail.
- Contractor staff for the local workforce board attends the enforcement docket, enrolls NCPs at the IV-D court, and explains the contract outlining NCP rights and responsibilities and the consequences of non-participation. They then set appointments for NCPs to come to the area one-stop centers to receive workforce services, which may include accessing labor market information, job counseling and job placement services, and possibly even short-term job training.
- A 30-day compliance report regarding NCP program participation and/or reported employment is sent to OAG and the IV-D courts from the boards' contractor staff. This evidence of NCP participation and employment is entered at a scheduled compliance hearing.
- *Capias*—court orders to take custody of the NCPs—are issued for noncompliant NCPs. In most sites, NCPs are offered a single chance to participate in the NCP Choices program; in El Paso, a second chance to participate is offered, but not a third.

At the phase of early implementation, there is general agreement among the key players that the OAG is driving and facilitating the initiative, but the active participation of the IV-D courts is critical. There is also agreement that noncompliant NCPs, who are expected to have barriers to participation and employment, will present a challenge to the agencies. Choices services will emphasize job search and related services, but may also include some training. Both sites expected transportation to be an issue for some NCPs, as well as mental health issues. There were also concerns that NCP skills might not match those needed in the local labor markets, or that some of their criminal histories might present a barrier to employment, although TWC does provide bonding.



The initial program assessment in Galveston/Brazoria counties indicates concern over potential communication difficulties, as well as problems serving NCPs from all over the Gulf Coast area. Initially they will serve only those NCPs in Galveston and Brazoria Counties, but they will track them wherever they move.

El Paso dealt with significant challenges in its first six weeks of operation, including concerns about reporting and multi-agency coordination, barriers to employment of NCPs, timing issues, and the feasibility of partial payments by NCPs.

The proposed impact analysis is designed to answer the following research questions on the primary outcomes of interest:

1. Does the NCP Choices program, which includes mandatory, court-ordered participation in workforce development services with the threat of jail time for non-participation for non-custodial parents of children who were or are receiving welfare benefits, lead to increased child support payments?
2. Does NCP Choices lead to more *consistent* payment of child support by non-custodial parents over time?

Additional research questions concerning the secondary outcomes of interest are as follows:

1. Does NCP Choices lead to increased workforce development participation by non-custodial parents? Alternatively, does it lead to differential incarceration rates for non-payment of child support?
2. Does NCP Choices lead to increased employment rates and earnings levels by non-custodial parents?
3. Does NCP Choices for non-custodial parents lead to decreased TANF participation for the associated custodial parents and their children?

RMC strongly recommends that the NCP Choices program be implemented as a random assignment design. Those identified as eligible should be randomly selected to either be ordered into the NCP Choices program, or to be in the control group that is not offered Choices services. If random assignment should prove infeasible, program impacts may still be assessed, albeit with reduced confidence that any effects observed can be attributed solely to NCP Choices. In this case, sophisticated quasi-experimental matching techniques will be

utilized for selection of an appropriate comparison group for measuring the impacts of NCP Choices.

Regardless of whether or not random assignment is used, it is important to recognize that the evaluation will not measure the impact of the Choices program on NCPs, but the *impact of being ordered into the NCP Choices program*. To see the importance of this subtle distinction, consider the range of reactions that an NCP could have to the order: he could enroll in Choices, but he could also get a job on his own, find the money to make payments, do nothing and go to jail, or he could flee. The success of the NCP Choices program will be determined by both the effectiveness of Choices services for NCPs and the frequency with which these other reactions occur, and there is no feasible research design that can unambiguously partition these effects. Although some might argue that the effectiveness of Choices on those who receive such services is a useful concept, in fact it has no practical application: after all, programs do not exist in a vacuum, but must rely on some method of enrolling participants. The impact analysis can present outcomes for those who enrolled in Choices, but these will be for descriptive purposes only, and not program impacts.

The period of study for the proposed impact analysis should involve collection of administrative data on participants and control group members beginning about two years prior to the program. Intake should last for one to two years, followed by administrative data collection up to two or more years subsequent to the first entries into the program.

Limitations of the analysis will be determined by design decisions, such as whether to use an experimental or quasi-experimental comparison group. If the latter design is chosen, as discussed above, the ability to confidently infer that any impacts observed were due to NCP Choices will be somewhat reduced. Similarly, if the duration of the study is shorter than recommended it could limit the ability of the evaluation to detect positive effects of NCP Choices. Finally, early implementation issues could limit the usefulness of data from orders that occur in the early period of the study.

Two additional research components are highly recommended as part of a complete impact analysis evaluation, but they could be scaled back or omitted should funding prove inadequate to support them. These components include a formal cost-benefit analysis and an update to the process analysis as a check on the functioning of, and an aid to interpreting the observed impacts of, a mature NCP Choices program.

## **I. Introduction**

In 2005, the Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) partnered with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) on a four-site demonstration project linking IV-D courts responsible for child support issues, OAG child support staff, and local workforce development boards to implement a model employment project for unemployed and/or underemployed non-custodial parents (NCPs) whose child is either currently receiving public assistance or has previously received public assistance. The project is referred to generally as the Non-custodial Parent Choices Initiative, though in some sites, local partners have given their project a distinctive name of its own, such as El Paso's Project *Trabajo Andale*.

After consulting with TWC, the OAG contracted with the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin to analyze the early implementation of the Non-custodial Parent Choices project in two sites that were to begin operating in June and July of 2005: the Edinburg office in the Lower Rio Grande Valley workforce development area; and the Texas City office, serving Galveston and Brazoria counties in the Gulf Coast workforce area.

However, due to delays in starting up the program, the implementation study did not start until August, when one of the two sites commenced operations. Ray Marshall Center researchers examined early efforts in the Texas City office, and in the El Paso office of the Upper Rio Grande workforce area, as a substitute for the original Lower Rio Grande Valley site. This report addresses the process of implementing this initiative, including the flow of clients from referrals through court orders, local workforce development services, and in their interactions with the OAG child support system. The NCP Choices program can be best understood by first examining the original Choices Program, established by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to address the employment and training needs of families and custodial parents.

### **The Choices Program Overview**

The "Choices" program refers to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Employment and Training program operated under TWC's primarily Work-First oriented service model. According to the TWC website, as a rationale for the Choices program, "both

State and federal welfare reform legislation emphasizes personal responsibility, time-limited cash assistance benefits, and the goal of work instead of welfare.” The Choices program addresses the State’s initiative to provide workforce development services to both single- and two-parent families. Although the program places emphasis on work-first strategies such as job search, it has features of a mixed model, in that it provides some training to those who pursue this option. One or both adults in these households must fulfill “the family’s mandatory work requirement.”

Choices participants, in the absence of the NCP Choices program, would consist only of custodial parents. Participation begins with a workforce orientation for applicants (WOA) as their introduction to workforce center services. The initial activities provided to the Choices participants include both job readiness and job search. When participants cannot find immediate employment, they participate in community service requirements. Those participants actively pursuing employment are also eligible for support services, including child care, transportation assistance, work-related expenses, and other support services to help in employment efforts. Some training opportunities are made available as well. Those failing to participate without “good cause” suffer sanctions and discontinuation of benefits. Finally, Choices participants are granted post-employment services to assist in “job retention, wage gains, career progression and progression to self-sufficiency.” Given this model, the NCP Choices program was developed as a complementary pilot project to serve non-custodial parents.

## **The NCP Choices Program in Brief**

The Texas OAG and TWC developed links between the IV-D courts, OAG’s child support efforts, and local workforce boards to implement a model employment program for unemployed NCPs whose child was either currently receiving or had previously received public assistance. This particular approach and model grew out of both research on and experience with serving this target population over at least a decade, as in the Choices program for TANF custodial parents.

Workforce providers, child support agencies, and non-profit community based organizations had previously engaged in efforts to connect unemployed non-custodial parents with employment services so those individuals could better support their child financially. The

outcomes or impacts from most of these projects were modest, generally resulting in only slight increases in earnings among participants and some gains in child support paid. Programs with the best outcomes—that is, higher and more consistent child support payments—“were those that linked a strong judicial order to participate in employment services, close monitoring of NCP program participation by workforce staff, reports of non-participation back to the courts, and ‘swift and certain consequences’ for non-participation (in other words, jail time!)” (OAG, 2005).

The NCP Choices program targets its efforts on unemployed NCPs with unpaid child support orders in cases managed by the OAG’s Child Support Division who were associated with custodial parents who currently or previously had received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, or Food Stamps benefits. The NCPs also had to reside in the geographical area served by the participating local workforce boards.

### **The NCP Choices Program Model**

The NCP Choices model is straightforward: noncompliant NCPs are given the choice of paying their child support, participating in workforce services, or going to jail. The primary distinguishing features of NCP Choices are mandatory participation and clear choices—pay, play or pay the consequences.

In brief, key elements of the NCP Choices model include the following (see Texas OAG, 2005):

- First, the OAG identifies NCPs on its caseload that are currently noncompliant with their child support payments, whose children either are or have been on welfare, and who also reside in the designated pilot workforce service areas.
- The IV-D Court sets an enforcement docket for the identified NCPs.
- OAG staff prepares consent orders, or modified probation orders.
- NCPs either sign the consent order to participate and complete the Choices program, make payment, or go to jail.
- Contractor staff for the local workforce board attends the enforcement docket, enrolls NCPs at the IV-D court, and explains the contract outlining NCP rights and responsibilities and the consequences of non-participation. They then set appointments for NCPs to come to one-stop centers to receive workforce services.

- A 30-day compliance report regarding NCP program participation and/or reported employment is sent to OAG and the IV-D courts from the boards' contractor staff. This evidence on NCP participation and employment is entered at a scheduled compliance hearing.
- Capias—court orders to take custody of the NCPs—are issued for noncompliant NCPs. In most sites, NCPs are offered one chance to participate in the NCP Choices program; in El Paso, a second chance to participate is offered, but not a third.

A more complete description of the NCP Choices model, with a participant flow diagram, is provided in Chapter 3.

## Research Questions

The research questions for this study are associated with either primary or secondary outcomes. The primary outcomes relate to child support collections, and are of greatest interest to the OAG, as they represent potential direct cost savings to the child support collection system. The secondary outcomes consist of some measures that gauge the extent to which mandating program participation succeeded, as well as intermediate outcomes, and/or those associated with potential cost savings to various entities or levels of government other than the OAG.

Research questions on the primary outcomes of interest are as follows:

1. Does the NCP Choices program, which includes mandatory, court-ordered participation in workforce development services with the threat of jail time for non-participation for non-custodial parents of children who were or are receiving welfare benefits, lead to increased child support payments?
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Research questions concerning the secondary outcomes of interest are as follows:

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3. Does NCP Choices for non-custodial parents lead to decreased TANF participation for the associated custodial parents and their children?

## **Research Approach**

Researchers sought to gather insights and information gleaned from this early implementation and process study to support a future analysis of the impact of the NCP Choices program. Although the analysis of program impacts is outside the scope of this paper, activities have been initiated in order to prepare for the impact analysis, including the development of a brief impact analysis plan (below). Additional funding will be required to complete the proposed impact analysis.

## **Organization of the Report**

This report is organized into five chapters and an appendix. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter II reviews the relevant research literature on non-custodial parents and distills what is known about the effects of programs referring and serving them through workforce development services. This review, in part, emphasizes programs designed for non-custodial parents in Texas and earlier research and evaluation projects conducted by the Ray Marshall Center. Chapter III provides a detailed description of the NCP Choices program and assesses the early implementation challenges and opportunities encountered by the program based on site visits conducted in August 2005. It also presents preliminary observations of the NCP Choices initiative for consideration by state policymakers and program administrators, providers and other key actors at both the state and local level. Chapter IV concludes with a preliminary analysis plan for conducting an impact analysis of the NCP Choices program in the near future. Appendix A lists the key contacts relied upon for this research at the state and local level. Appendix B contains the field interview guides that were used for the site visits.

## II. Review of Literature on Non-custodial Parents

### Background

The number of children living in single-parent households in the United States has increased dramatically since the 1960s. While an estimated 9 percent of children under 18 lived with a single parent in 1960, by 2000 this rate had increased to nearly 27 percent.<sup>1</sup> As a result, most children living in the United States today will spend part of their childhood in a single-parent household.<sup>2</sup>

Policymakers are especially concerned with the disproportionate number of single-parent households that live in poverty. While 9.2 percent of all U.S. families had incomes below the poverty level in 2000, fully 26.5 percent of families with a female head of household and no husband present fell below the poverty level.<sup>3</sup> In Texas the picture is worse, with 11.9 percent of all families below the poverty level in 1999, and 42.1 percent of families comprised of female head of household and no husband present below poverty.<sup>4</sup>

### The Significance of Child Support

Policymakers view child support as a key strategy for reducing high poverty rates among single-parent families and reducing the public costs associated with supporting these families. Child support can be an important source of income for single-parent households, especially for poor families:

- Twenty-two percent of poor women who received child support in 1995 were lifted above the poverty line by child support receipts.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sigle-Rushton, Wendy and Sara McLanahan, *Father Absence and Child Well-being: A Critical Review* (October 2002), p. 2. Online. Available: <http://www.cpr.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan-smeedingconference/mclanahan-siglerushton.pdf>. Accessed: June 7, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Legler, Paul, *Low-Income Fathers and Child Support: Starting Off on the Right Track*, (Denver, CO: Policy Studies, Inc., 2003), p.1. Online. Available: [http://www.aecf.org/publications/data/right\\_track.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/publications/data/right_track.pdf). Accessed: June 7, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3, Matrices P90, P91, P92, P93, PCT59, PCT60, and PCT61. Online. Available: [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF3\\_U&\\_lang=en&\\_ts=148384682165](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U&_lang=en&_ts=148384682165). Accessed: June 7, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, Cynthia, Mary Farrell, Maria Cancian, and Daniel R. Meyer, *The Interaction of Child Support and TANF: Evidence from Samples of Current and Former Welfare Recipients* (New York,



- In 2001, child support payments accounted for 30 percent of income (\$2,550) in families with incomes below 100 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Child support accounted for 15.5 percent of income (\$3,980) for families between 100 and 200 percent of the poverty guidelines.<sup>6</sup>
- More than 60 percent of 2004 child support cases belonged to families who currently or previously received public assistance such as TANF, Medicaid, Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income, or subsidized housing.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, 55 percent of Texas' FY 2004 child support cases included families who currently or previously received public assistance.<sup>8</sup>
- In 2004, 16 percent of child support cases included families currently receiving public assistance and 46 percent included families who had previously received assistance.<sup>9</sup> Likewise in Texas, 11 percent of FY 2004 child support cases included families currently receiving public assistance and 43 percent included families who previously received assistance.<sup>10</sup>
- Last year, CSE collected \$1.1 billion nationally for families currently receiving public assistance and \$9.4 billion for families who had previously received assistance.<sup>11</sup> In Texas, CSE collected \$23.6 million for families currently receiving assistance and \$642.1 million for families who had previously received assistance.<sup>12</sup>

Compliance with child support orders has improved substantially in recent years, in part because of changes implemented under welfare reform. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) enacted in August 1996 made nearly 50 changes to the child support enforcement system including streamlined paternity establishment procedures, the establishment of a National Directory of New Hires to track

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NY: MDRC, January 2005), pp.15-16. Online. Available:

<http://www.mdrc.org/publications/397/full.pdf>. Accessed: June 22, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Sorensen, Elaine, "Child Support Gains Some Ground," *Snapshots3 of America's Families*, No. 11 (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, October 2003), p.2.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. *Child Support Enforcement, FY 2004 Preliminary Report* (June 2005). Online. Available: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/2005/reports/preliminary\\_report/#results](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/2005/reports/preliminary_report/#results). Accessed: June 24, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. *State Boxscores for FY2004* (June 2005). Online. Available: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/2005/reports/preliminary\\_report/state\\_boxscores.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/2005/reports/preliminary_report/state_boxscores.html) Accessed: October 21, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> US DHHS, ACF, *Child Support Enforcement, FY 2004 Preliminary Report (online)*.

<sup>10</sup> US DHHS, ACF, *State Boxscores for FY2004 (online)*.

<sup>11</sup> US DHHS, ACF, *Child Support Enforcement, FY 2004 Preliminary Report (online)*.

<sup>12</sup> US DHHS, ACF, *State Boxscores for FY2004 (online)*.

NCPs with child support arrears, and uniform interstate child support laws.<sup>13</sup> As a result of these and other changes:

- The proportion of families in the child support program receiving payments more than doubled from 1996 (20 percent) to 2003 (50 percent).<sup>14</sup> In Texas, “paternity establishments, established orders and collections have all increased as a result of Texas’ efforts to strengthen enforcement procedures”.<sup>15</sup>
- The number of parents receiving the full amount due has increased from 37 percent in 1994 to 45 percent today.<sup>16</sup> Texas moved from 16<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> among all states in total collections from 1998 to 1995.<sup>17</sup>
- In 2004, child support enforcement collected \$21.9 billion, a 75 percent increase from 1996 (\$12 billion).<sup>18</sup>

Despite these gains, the system continues to have its shortcomings:

- The proportion of custodial mothers receiving support has remained fairly constant (75 percent) over the past decade.<sup>19</sup>
- Child support receipt rates for welfare parents have increased over time but they continue to have lower rates of receipt than their counterparts.<sup>20</sup>
- Fewer TANF parents (53 percent) have child support awards than their counterparts (63 percent).<sup>21</sup>

Because many (26.5 percent) single-head-of-household families continue to subsist on poverty wages, increasing child support compliance remains a key strategy for lifting these families out of poverty.

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<sup>13</sup> US DHHS, ACF, *National Directory of New Hires: Guide for Data Submission*, doc. v. 9 (December 2004), p.1-1. Online. Available: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/newhire/library/ndnh/guide/1.pdf>. Accessed: October 21, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Turetsky, Vicki, *The Child Support Program: An Investment That Works* (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, April 2005). p.2. Online. Available: [http://www.clasp.org/publications/cs\\_funding\\_042005.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/publications/cs_funding_042005.pdf) Accessed June 24, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Schexnayder, Deanna T. et al, *The Role of Child Support in Texas Welfare Dynamics*, (Austin, Texas: Center for the Study of Human Resources, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin, September 1998), p.9.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, Cynthia, et al, *The Interaction of Childs Support and TANF: Evidence from Samples of Current and Former Welfare Recipients*, p.21.

<sup>17</sup> Schexnayder, Deanna T. et al, *The Role of Child Support in Texas Welfare Dynamics*, p.9.

<sup>18</sup> Ray Marshall Center analysis of child support enforcement data and USHHS (2005).

<sup>19</sup> Quoting Grall (2003) in Miller et al. (2005) p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Referencing Huang, Garfinkel, and Waldfogel (2000) in Miller et al. (2005) p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> Miller et al. *The Interaction of Childs Support and TANF: Evidence from Samples of Current and Former Welfare Recipients*, p. 2.

## Reasons for Noncompliance

Non-custodial parents who fail to comply with child support orders are often stereotyped as “deadbeats,” or mean-spirited individuals who are indifferent to their children’s needs. However, research demonstrates that parents’ actual reasons for noncompliance are far more complex. In fact, there is strong evidence that most NCPs care about the well-being of their children and want to be involved in their lives.<sup>22</sup> The complex reasons NCPs fail to meet their child support obligations are discussed below.

## Mistrust and Suspicion

NCPs may view the child support enforcement system as unfair, insensitive, and punitive.<sup>23</sup> Non-custodial parents:

- Often assume that orders are pre-set and allow no room for negotiation, creating a “resentment of the insensitivity of the system towards their precarious and shifting circumstances”<sup>24</sup>
- Complain that the system is more diligent in enforcing child support orders than enforcing their visitation rights.<sup>25</sup>
- Perceive the child support system as equivalent with the criminal justice system, and assume that the primary goal of the program is punitive action towards them<sup>26</sup>
- Have “a general feeling that the courts should not interfere in their families”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sylvester, Kathleen and Jonathan O’Connell, “What about fathers?” The Washington Times (July 27, 2003) p. B04; Baron, Juliane and Kathleen Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families: Austin’s Opportunities* (Washington DC: Social Policy Action Network, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Doolittle, Fred and Suzanne Lynn, *Working with Low-Income Cases: Lessons for the Child Support Enforcement System from Parents’ Fair Share*. (New York, NY: MDRC, May 1998), p.59.

<sup>24</sup> Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., Kay E. Sherwood, and Mercer L. Sullivan, *Caring and Paying: What Fathers and Mothers Say About Child Support* (New York: MDRC, July 1992), p.14; Reichert, Dana, *Broke But Not Deadbeat: Reconnecting Low-Income Fathers and Children*. Washington, D.C., National Conference of State Legislatures (July 1999). pp.8-9 Online. Available: <http://www.calib.com/peerta/pdf/broken.pdf>. Accessed: July 15, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Baron, Juliane and Kathleen Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families: Austin’s Opportunities*, 2002, p.19.

<sup>26</sup> Reichert, Dana, *Broke But Not Deadbeat: Reconnecting Low-Income Fathers and Children*, p. 9 (online); Doolittle, Fred and Suzanne Lynn, *Working with Low-Income Cases: Lessons for the Child Support Enforcement System from Parents’ Fair Share*, p.59.

<sup>27</sup> Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., et al, *Caring and Paying: What Fathers and Mothers Say About Child Support* (New York, NY: MDRC, July 1992), p.14

## **Informal Supports**

For a variety of reasons, many NCPs provide their children with an “informal” version of child support such as gifts of cash, clothing, diapers, formula, or toys.<sup>28</sup> Possible explanations for a tendency towards provision of informal support include distrust of government, a personal preference for tangible gifts, potential for increased contact with the children, concerns that income earned illegally will draw unwanted attention to the NCP’s finances, and avoidance of TANF pass-through policies, which in some states (Texas included) retain a portion of child support payments for the state as a reimbursement for public assistance funds paid to the family.

## **Disputes with the Custodial Parent**

NCPs sometimes withhold child support due to disagreements with the custodial parent.<sup>29</sup> Common sources of tension between the parents include disputes over custody, visitation rights, or child support; hostile relations with custodial parent’s extended family; jealousy over competing romantic relationships; disputes over child-rearing practices; and poor personal relationships between the parents as a result of immaturity and limited exposure to positive relationship role models.

## **Lack of Financial Resources**

Many NCPs face a variety of complex barriers to paying regular child support. For example:

- A 1999 study found that 41 percent of low-income, non-custodial fathers had been unemployed for at least one year.<sup>30</sup>
- A 2001 study found that 2.5 million non-custodial fathers lived in poverty and had a limited to nonexistent ability to pay child support.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Joelle Hervesi Sander and Jacqueline L. Rosen, “Teenage Fathers: Working with the Neglected Partner in Adolescent Childbearing,” *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 19, no. 3 (May/June 1987), p. 107; Dana Reichert, *Broke But Not Deadbeat: Reconnecting Low-Income Fathers and Children* (Washington, D.C., National Conference of State Legislatures, July 1999), p. 11. Online. Available: <http://www.calib.com/peerta/pdf/broken.pdf>. Accessed: July 15, 2003; Virginia Knox and Cynthia Miller, *The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents' Fair Share* (New York, NY: MDRC, November 2001). Online. Available: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/104/overview.html>. Accessed: July 15, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Juliane Baron and Kathleen Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families: Austin’s Opportunities* (Washington DC: Social Policy Action Network, 2002), p. 5; *TFF Final Evaluation Report*, p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Boyd, Fatherhood Fact Sheet.

The reasons for NCP financial challenges are complex. Economic trends over the past thirty years – including the decline in the manufacturing sector and emigration of jobs out of the inner city – have left unskilled men especially with fewer opportunities for meaningful employment.<sup>32</sup> Other barriers to gainful employment faced by NCPs include:

- **Limited Education** – Nationally, an estimated 40 percent of low-income NCPs have not completed high school or earned a GED.<sup>33</sup>
- **Limited Work History** – Many NCPs have little or no work experience, making it difficult for them to obtain well-paying jobs.<sup>34</sup>
- **Mental Health & Behavioral Issues** – NCPs may experience feelings of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness.<sup>35</sup>
- **Substance Abuse** – Some NCPs have drug or alcohol addictions that affect their employability.<sup>36</sup>
- **Insufficient access to transportation** – The lack of reliable transportation makes it difficult for NCPs to secure and retain good jobs.<sup>37</sup>
- **Transience** – Many low-income NCPs move frequently, have no stable home setting, and are difficult to contact.<sup>38</sup>
- **Criminal Backgrounds** – Research indicates that up to 70 percent of all low-income NCPs have had contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>39</sup> Criminal backgrounds create serious obstacles to securing employment.

If research demonstrating that NCPs want to be responsible parents is correct, addressing the complex array of issues facing this population may be the most promising route to improving child support enforcement and, subsequently, improving the lives of

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<sup>31</sup> Elaine Sorensen and Chava Zibman, “Getting to Know Poor Fathers Who Do Not Pay Child Support,” *Social Service Review*, vol. 75, no. 3 (September 2001), p. 430.

<sup>32</sup> Virginia Knox and Cynthia Miller, *The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents' Fair Share* (New York, NY: MDRC, November 2001, p. 10. Online. Available: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/104/overview.html>. Accessed: July 15, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Elaine Sorensen, “States Move To Put Low-Income Noncustodial Parents in Work Activities.” *Public Welfare*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Winter 1997b), pp. 17–23; Baron and Sylvester, *Keeping Fathers in Families*, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Sylvester and O’Connell, “What about Fathers?”

<sup>35</sup> Weinman, Smith, and Buzi, *Young Fathers*, pp. 437–453.

<sup>36</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, p. 8, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Baron and Sylvester, *Expanding the Goals*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>38</sup> Doolittle and Lynn, *Working with Low-Income Cases*, p. 59.

<sup>39</sup> Reichert, *Broke But Not Deadbeat*.

children in single-parent families. The following section discusses some of the strategies programs are trying in order to address these issues.

## **Enhanced Child Support Enforcement**

Given the continuing challenge of improving child support compliance, there is considerable interest in “enhanced child support enforcement,” programs which go beyond traditional child support enforcement activities in order to test innovative approaches to increasing compliance. These programs typically focus on efforts to connect unemployed and underemployed non-custodial parents with employment services so they can better support their children financially. Common services include job training and/or job placement assistance; group and individual counseling; mediation and/or legal assistance with custody or visitation issues; parenting education; mentoring; case management; and assorted supportive services such as basic needs assistance, substance abuse counseling, etc.

To date, the effects of the majority of NCP programs have been modest and, at times, equivocal. A recent literature review found that programs for non-custodial parents:

- Encourage participation in workforce activities;
- Increase employment, at least in the short term;
- May increase earnings; and
- Sometimes increase the frequency of child support payments.<sup>40</sup>

Because of data collection issues and the difficult task of comparing programs with greatly varying approaches, quality of services, and intensity of services, the reasons for these relatively weak impacts are not entirely clear. However, research does suggest that - excluding circumstances beyond programs’ control (e.g. the recent economic downturn) - there are two fundamental challenges facing enhanced child support enforcement programs for NCPs: difficulty implementing services as designed, and difficulty recruiting, enrolling, and retaining participants.

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<sup>40</sup> Looney and Schexnayder 2004, pp. 9-11

### ***Implementation Challenges***

Difficulties in implementing services as designed are certainly not unique to programs that serve NCPs. The most commonly cited problems relate to the timeframe for a program: longer-than-expected startup periods and overall program evaluation durations that are too short for the interventions to have their desired effect.<sup>41</sup> Research suggests that these problems could be resolved if 1) program designers will allow sufficient time for a pilot phase to test and refine interventions prior to full implementation and 2) funders will adapt their schedules to provide programs with ample time to implement a program and sustain it long enough for effects to take hold.

There are also noteworthy challenges associated with coordinating services across multiple organizations. Substantial time should be reserved for planning, coalition building, and testing prior to full-scale implementation. Staff should have a demonstrated ability to “build referral networks with local organizations, effectively communicate priorities to staff members, be open to considering feedback and suggestions, and approach programmatic challenges with creative solutions.”<sup>42</sup>

### ***Participation Challenges***

Participation issues are even more complex. A disconcertingly large share of programs serving NCPs in the past decade found it difficult to recruit the targeted number of parents. Some of the challenges associated with participation rates can be mitigated through thoughtful planning, more effective program management, and changes in program design. But some of the challenges are so persistent they suggest a paradigm shift may be necessary. Addressing these implementation challenges so that programs are able to provide significant numbers of NCPs with the services they advertise is the first and most important step. This not only helps with retention but can also help with recruiting since word of mouth is known to affect NCP program participation.<sup>43</sup> Program designers must also pay attention to eligibility rules: casting a wider net is likely to engage a larger number of NCPs. It is important to keep eligibility issues in mind when selecting a funder; many grants – especially

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<sup>41</sup> Looney and Schexnayder; Schroeder, Looney, and Schexnayder

<sup>42</sup> Looney and Schexnayder

<sup>43</sup> Looney and Schexnayder, p. 16

those provided by the federal government – have stipulations that may result in eligibility issues for potential participants.

Once these two underlying issues are addressed, program directors must next choose whether they wish to run a voluntary program or a program that compels participation through a judicial mandate (or a mix of both). Voluntary programs typically need to engage in creative, aggressive outreach campaigns to attract participants. Strategies include media campaigns, posting fliers, canvassing, and house visits. Referrals from partner agencies may also be helpful. If a program is able to gain the trust and approval of its participants, they may also be a good source of recruits. One site of the Bootstrap project had 14 “peer referrals” in which fathers referred friends and family members to the program.

While some NCPs will *voluntarily participate* in enhanced child support enforcement programs out of concern for their child’s well being, these parents are, in fact, rare. As discussed previously, many NCPs fear and distrust the formal child support system, and are reluctant to get involved in any program associated with it. Furthermore, because most government and social service programs have historically targeted women and children, there may be a stigma associated with men’s participation.<sup>44</sup> Given the fact that the overwhelming majority of NCPs are male, this stigma could act as a major deterrent to participation.

To overcome these challenges, most voluntary programs employ some sort of incentive to encourage participation. Past incentives include adjustments to child support orders, arrears forgiveness, the opportunity to access legal counsel, and cash stipends. The efficacy of this approach is unclear. While programs like Bootstrap (which provided cash stipends) have had modest success with incentives, they nevertheless struggled to reach their enrollment goals.

An alternate strategy for improving participation rates is *mandating participation* through judicial orders reinforced by “swift and certain consequences” for non-participation. Experience suggests that these strategies may have some promise. The Shawnee County Non-custodial Project began as a voluntary Welfare to Work project. After multiple outreach attempts, only 2 NCPs enrolled in the program, both of which dropped out the same day. However, when the program shifted to a model in which a judge mandated participation or

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<sup>44</sup> Looney (2004) p. 15



jail, 65-80 percent who agreed to participate did so and 65-90 percent of the participating NCPs made monthly payments.<sup>45</sup> The Parents' Fair Share demonstration also found that the likelihood of sanctions for nonappearance reportedly made a difference in appearance rates.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, sanctions also have their limitations. Getting NCPs to appear at a meeting to review or set their child support orders—the first step to establishing a participation mandate—can be very challenging. The Parent's Fair Share initiative had appearance rates ranging from 5 percent to 70 percent.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, cost issues present a challenge, as it sometimes costs taxpayers more to support the parent in jail for a few days than the parent's total monthly child support obligation.<sup>48</sup> Imposing sanctions for nonappearance proved to be more difficult than anticipated under the Parent's Fair Share program.<sup>49</sup> Most importantly, sanctions alone fail to address the root causes of noncompliance for poor NCPs who have difficulty paying due to low or nonexistent earnings and problems with mental illness or substance abuse, among others.

Further research is needed to clarify whether sanctions programs 1) improve program participation rates and 2) result in positive outcomes for NCPs and their offspring. By further exploring this topic, this project will bolster our understanding of the efficacy of sanctions.

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<sup>45</sup> Hayes, Michael, "Responsible Fatherhood and Child Support Connections." PowerPoint presentation to the Looking Forward for Families conference, Austin, TX (May 14, 2004). Online. Archived: [http://64.233.187.104/search?q=cache:WzIR4CaG-V8J:www.tec.state.tx.us/twcinfor/conf/michael\\_hayes.pdf+%22swift+and+certain+consequences%22+%22child+support%22&hl=en&client=firefox-a](http://64.233.187.104/search?q=cache:WzIR4CaG-V8J:www.tec.state.tx.us/twcinfor/conf/michael_hayes.pdf+%22swift+and+certain+consequences%22+%22child+support%22&hl=en&client=firefox-a). Accessed June 27, 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Doolittle and Lynn, May 1998, p. 33

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> National Association of State Workforce Agencies. "Shawnee County Non-Custodial Project." 2002 National Customer Service Awards: Architect of Change Nominations. Online. Available: [http://www.naswa.org/articles/printer\\_friendly.cfm?results\\_art\\_filename=2002awards.htm#archks](http://www.naswa.org/articles/printer_friendly.cfm?results_art_filename=2002awards.htm#archks). Accessed June 27, 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Doolittle and Lynn, May 1998, p. 33

### **III. Early Implementation Analysis**

This chapter presents findings from an analysis of the planning and early implementation experiences with the Non-custodial Parent Choices Project. The analysis is based upon discussions with staff in the agencies collaborating in the project and on interviews conducted during visits to two of the early implementation sites, El Paso County on the U.S./Mexico border in west Texas and Galveston and Brazoria Counties in southeast Texas.

Ray Marshall Center researchers conducted this preliminary process and implementation study of the NCP Choices projects in El Paso and Galveston/Brazoria Counties in late summer, 2005.<sup>50</sup> The purpose of this study was to develop a clear understanding of planning, policies and program procedures as well as the operational contexts for the project in the two study sites. The study describes the NCP Choices program model, its target population, service delivery configurations, activities and services available to the NCPs, participant flow, and data collection and tracking procedures in the initiatives. It notes divergences between the service delivery design and actual practices, as well as similarities and differences between study sites. The process study results will help to guide the planned impact analysis described in Chapter IV. Lastly, the process and implementation analysis provides a basis for immediate feedback to the responsible state and local agencies regarding program policies and practices and their expected effects in order to support mid-course corrections if needed and continuous program improvement.

#### **The NCP Choices Program Model**

Under the NCP Choices model, noncompliant NCPs are given the choice of paying their child support, participating in workforce services, or going to jail. As mentioned above, the primary distinguishing features of NCP Choices are mandatory participation and clear choices—pay, play or pay the consequences.

This particular model for serving NCPs was developed based on experiences with earlier programs for both custodial and non-custodial parents described in Chapter II,

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<sup>50</sup> Copies of the field interview guides that were used with OAG, IV-D Courts and the local workforce systems are provided in Appendix B.

including the TANF Choices program for CPs, the national Parent’s Fair Share Demonstration, and the Bootstrap Program, as well as experience with serving NCPs in Welfare-to-Work programs in the late 1990s and early 2000s (e.g., Doolittle and Lynn, 2002; and Looney and Schexnayder, 2004). Policymakers and program administrators had found that noncompliant NCPs were unlikely to pay child support or to participate in workforce services if paying and participating were completely voluntarily. Both were far more likely if there were mandates that were accompanied by “swift and certain consequences.” The NCP Choices Program had its origins in these earlier experiences and represents an attempt to test and learn from an approach to serving NCPs that embodies these key features.

In brief, the key elements of the NCP Choices model are:

- First, the Texas OAG identifies NCPs on its caseload that are noncompliant with their child support payments, whose children either are or have been on welfare, and who also reside in the designated pilot workforce service areas.
- The IV-D Court, which is responsible for child support enforcement in Texas, sets an enforcement docket for the identified NCPs.
- OAG staff prepares consent orders, or modified probation orders.
- NCPs either sign the consent order to participate and complete the Choices program, make the requisite child support payments, or go to jail.
- Contractor staff for the local workforce board attends the enforcement docket, enrolls NCPs at the IV-D court, and explains the contract outlining NCP rights and responsibilities and the consequences of non-participation. They then set appointments for NCPs to come to the area one-stop centers to receive workforce services, which may include accessing labor market information, job counseling and job placement services, and possibly even short-term job training.
- A 30-day compliance report regarding NCP program participation and/or reported employment is sent to OAG and the IV-D courts from the boards’ contractor staff. This evidence of NCP participation and employment is entered at a scheduled compliance hearing.
- Capias—court orders to take custody of the NCPs—are issued for noncompliant NCPs. In most sites, NCPs are offered a single chance to participate in the NCP Choices program; in El Paso, a second chance to participate is offered, but not a third.

The specific responsibilities of the key actors in the NCP Choices Program are described below (see Texas OAG, 2005). Texas *OAG Child Support responsibilities* under the NCP Choices program are as follows:

- Identify noncompliant NCPs for possible participation in the NCP Choices program;
- Communicate program benefits to both Custodial as well as Non-custodial Parents;
- Set the number of NCPs targeted for participation based on the capacity of the designated local workforce development boards (LWDBs);
- Prepare consent/probation orders for the NCP cases;
- Track child support payment records for participating NCPs;
- Present evidence at enforcement hearings for noncompliant NCPs; and
- Provide continuous feedback to improve NCP Choices program performance through monthly “staffings” with LWDB and contractor staff.

*Local workforce development board and/or contractor responsibilities* under the NCP Choices Program are as follows:

- Designate staff to manage the NCP Choices project;
- Supply staff to enroll NCPs on-site at the IV-D courts;
- Provide NCPs with information packets and participation agreements;
- Ensure that services—ranging from the provision of labor market information, job counseling, and job placement services to short-term job training—are provided to participating NCPs through their local One-stop contractors;
- Track NCP program compliance;
- Submit compliance reports to OAG and IV-D Courts;
- Notify OAG staff of employment by participating NCPs;
- Submit quarterly summary of NCP program participation, services received, and employment placements to OAG and IV-D Courts; and
- Provide continuous feedback to improve program performance through monthly “staffings” with the OAG, LWDBs and IV-D Courts.

The *IV-D Court responsibilities* under the NCP Choices Program are:

- Set the docket for NCP participation in the NCP Choices program;

- Communicate program benefits to Custodial and Non-custodial Parents;
- Ensure “swift and certain” consequences for noncompliant NCPs, i.e., *capias* and jail time; and
- Provide continuous feedback to OAG to improve program performance through monthly “staffings” with the OAG and LWDBs.

## **NCP Choices Participant Flow**

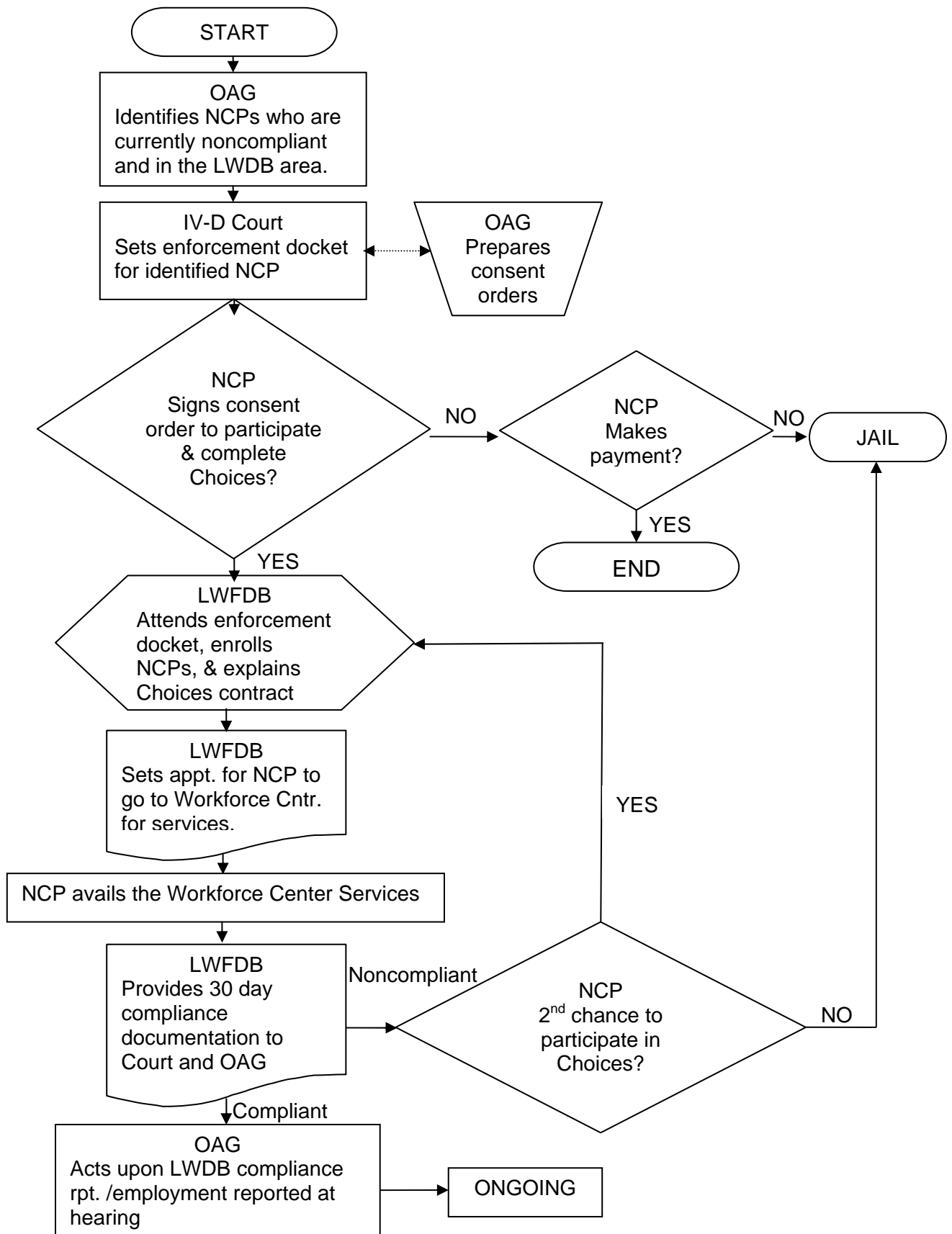
Figure 1 depicts the planned participant flow for the NCP Choices Program without distinguishing between paths that were actually implemented for the two participating sites. Galveston/Brazoria Counties had not yet implemented the NCP Choices Program at the time of the site visits in late August but anticipated a similar flow of participants in their process. Since El Paso had already begun implementing Project *Trabajo Andale*, the local version of the NCP Choices Program, their participant flow in practice deviates slightly from the one shown, mainly due to their incorporating additional players in their participant tracking and reporting efforts.

The first difference in the client flow in El Paso’s *Trabajo Andale* comes from their decision to have NCP participants begin orientation immediately at the courthouse with the on-site workforce services staff from Upper Rio Grande at Work’s One-stop contractor, SERCO, who also serves as more of an overall complete case manager for clients, unlike other sites. But, the major difference from the planned participant flow shown in Figure 1 stems from El Paso’s tracking and reporting efforts.

Workforce staff from SERCO must email a report to three Domestic Relations Office’s (DRO) Probation Officers and appropriate contacts at the OAG El Paso field office after two (2) weeks regarding NCP compliance with the Choices program. A subsequent report from the Upper Rio Grande at Work workforce staff goes to same players after four (4) weeks in order to determine if a compliance hearing is required. OAG staff then sends the report back to Upper Rio Grande at Work and DRO with information regarding what action the OAG decided to take. These actions range from canceling the compliance hearing, resetting the compliance hearing for the 12-week anniversary, or filing a “motion to revoke.” The DRO supplements each compliance report furnished by the Upper Rio Grande at Work with any additional information within 24 hours of receiving the report.

The final difference in the El Paso process is in the hearing sentencing phase. Upper Rio Grande provides immediate reports (i.e., within two days) to the DRO and the OAG staff contact when the NCP first enters employment. These reports are separate from the compliance emails/reports in order to assure that an Administrative Income Withholdings (AIW) form gets filed for child support collection. When the NCP is not compliant, a hearing will be held, and the Judge (Minton) will likely sentence them to jail. However, if the NCP is compliant by that time, the hearing is cancelled and the NCP remains on probation until arrears are paid in full.

**FIGURE 1. NCP Choices Program Participant Flow**



## Site Descriptions: El Paso and Galveston/Brazoria Counties

Ray Marshall Center researchers compiled demographic and program information for the two local workforce development areas involved in this NCP Choices study, as well as for Texas as a whole, relying on United States 2000 Census Data, U.S. Department of Labor data, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation-funded *Texas Kid Count* Project. This demographic data includes age, race/ethnicity, gender, children, education level, and income. Table 1 presents these demographic data.

### Demographic Profiles

The *age* distribution of the population is similar across the two workforce areas. Approximately 30 percent are within the 25-44 year range, and about 20 percent fall within the 5-17 year and the 45-64 year age ranges.

The *racial/ethnic* distribution varies considerably by workforce area. The Gulf Coast area is 62.9 percent White or Anglo, while Upper Rio Grande is 77.7 percent Hispanic (which can be of any race). While the Gulf Coast area has an African-American population of 16.9 percent, less than 3 percent of Upper Rio Grande's population is African-American.

The majority of *children in their own family* come from married-couple families with 76.1 percent in the Gulf Coast LWDA and 73.7 percent in the Upper Rio Grande workforce area. Slightly over 25 percent of all own children in married couple families range in ages 6 to 11 years for both areas.

In terms of *education*, 76.2 percent of residents 25 years of age or over in the Gulf Coast area have a high school diploma or above, but only 65.6 percent in the Upper Rio Grande were at least high school graduates. However, the share of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher is 26.1 percent in the Gulf Coast area but only 16.7 percent for Upper Rio Grande.

Finally, nearly 7 percent of the households in Upper Rio Grande received *public assistance*, while in the Gulf Coast, the share was only 2.5 percent.



**TABLE 1. Selected Features of the NCP Sites and Texas**

	<b>Gulf Coast</b>	<b>Upper Rio Grande</b>	<b>Texas</b>
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Age<sup>1</sup></b>			
5 to 17 years	20.9	23.3	20.4
25 to 44 years	32.6	29.1	31.1
45 to 64 years	20.6	18.6	20.2
Over 65 years	7.9	9.9	9.9
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White	62.9	70.8	71.0
Black or African American	16.9	2.8	11.5
Other	20.2	1.2	17.5
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	28.6	77.7	32.0
<b>Sex<sup>2</sup></b>			
Male	49.9	48.3	49.6
Female	50.1	51.7	50.4
<b>Family Type and Age of Children</b>			
In married-couple families	76.1	73.7	75.5
6 to 11 years	26.3	25.9	26.0
12 to 17 years	24.2	24.6	24.5
<b>Educational Attainment</b> <i>Population 25 years and over</i>			
High school graduate or higher	76.2	65.6	75.7
Bachelor's degree or higher	26.1	16.7	23.2
<b>Income</b> <i>Households</i>			
With earnings	86.7	82.2	83.9
With Supplemental Security income	3.2	5.5	3.9
With public assistance income	2.5	6.8	3.2

Sources: 2000 Census Data; Bureau of Labor Statistics; and Texas Kids Count data.

### **Program Profiles**

Geographically, Gulf Coast and Upper Rio Grande are two of the larger workforce development areas in the state, as depicted in Figure 2. Gulf Coast Workforce Development Area (WDA No. 28) covers a 13-county region in Southeast Texas including Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Galveston, Fort Bend, Harris, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller and Wharton Counties. The economy in the Gulf Coast WDA

is led by the large chemical and petroleum product manufacturers, education, government, a large private sector particularly in health services, and shipping and international trade via ports along the Gulf of Mexico. Major occupational opportunities exist for managers, food preparation workers, personnel service providers, and sales representatives. Texas' most populous city, Houston, is the area's major metropolitan area.

In the year 2000, the Gulf Coast region had a total population of 4,302,780. The population of this area is expected to increase to 4,580,315 by 2010, representing a 6.5 percent increase in ten years.

In 2000, the Gulf Coast region's total employment for all industries was 2,533,030. That number is expected to grow to 3,009,050 by the year 2010, a projected 18.8 percent increase in employment.<sup>51</sup>

The Upper Rio Grande Workforce Development Area (WDA No. 10) covers the six-county region of Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, and Presidio Counties. The city of El Paso dominates the economy of the Upper Rio Grande WDA. El Paso's major industries include government (particularly military), telecommunications, miscellaneous manufacturing, and tourism. Industry in the outlying counties encompasses ranching, cotton and beef production, hunting, and tourism. National Parks and a mountainous terrain contribute to a high level of tourism. Major occupational opportunities exist for managers, health practitioners, sales representatives, and food preparation workers.

According to the TWC LMCI, in the year 2000 the Upper Rio Grande region had a total population of 723,172. The population of the area is expected to increase 12.7 percent by 2010.

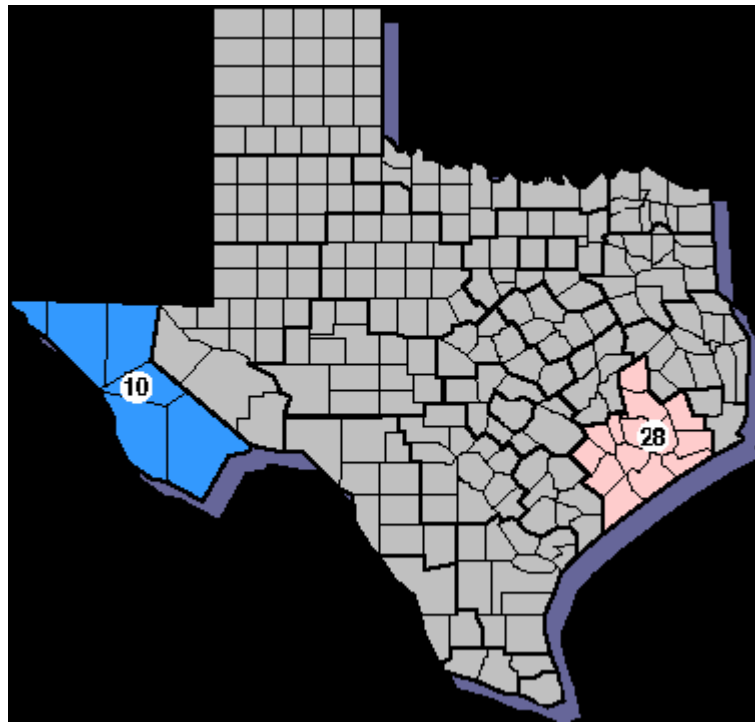
In 2000, the Upper Rio Grande region total employment for all industries was 289,790. That number is expected to grow to 337,710 by the year 2010, an expected 16.5 percent increase in employment.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Texas Workforce Commission, *Local Workforce Development Board Integrated Plan for the Gulf Coast Workforce Board: Program Year 2004/Fiscal Year 2005 Integrated Plan Modification-Appendix F: Labor Market Information* (June 16, 2004). p. V-6. Online. Available: [http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/board\\_plan/plans/gulf.pdf](http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/board_plan/plans/gulf.pdf). Accessed: October 1, 2005.

<sup>52</sup> Texas Workforce Commission, *Upper Rio Grande Workforce Development Board Integrated Plan Modification: Program Year 2004/Fiscal Year 2005 Integrated Plan Modification-Appendix F: Labor*

**FIGURE 2. LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD MAP**



Source: Adapted from Texas Workforce Commission, *Local Workforce Development Boards*. Online.

## **Early Implementation Findings**

Key early implementation findings reflect different phases of implementation for each of the sites. The El Paso site marked four weeks of activity at the time of the field visits, while Galveston and Brazoria Counties were still very much in the planning stage for NCP Choices and did not actually begin operations—i.e., sending the first NCPs to WorkSource—until the very end of August. This study offers early planning and implementation findings based on a review of program background, planning efforts, NCP Choices service delivery, community partnerships developed, labor market context, and initial program assessment for both sites, but from somewhat different bases. While El Paso is ahead of Brazoria and Galveston Counties in terms of starting up its NCP Choices Program, in fact it is only slightly ahead. El Paso began implementing the program in mid-July; Galveston County did

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*Market Information* (June 20, 2004). p.142. Online. Available: [http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/board\\_plan/plans/urio.pdf](http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/board_plan/plans/urio.pdf). Accessed: October 1, 2005.

so at the end of August, and Brazoria County is scheduled to begin in October.<sup>53</sup> Within a few months, and certainly by early 2006, both sites will be deep into project implementation with NCPs enrolled in various workforce services and tracking and reporting well underway among the partners in the program.

The design and implementation of the two ongoing projects varied in part due to differences in their implementation dates. Another significant difference between the sites was in the number of actors involved in the program. Actors in the El Paso program included the OAG staff, the IV-D court master, the El Paso Domestic Relations Office and the Upper Rio Grande At Work board and contractor (SERCO); however, the Galveston/Brazoria program only included the Office of Attorney General staff, the IV-D court master, and the WorkSource workforce board and its contractor (Interfaith). There is no Domestic Relations Office in Brazoria/Galveston Counties. The primary similarity between El Paso and Galveston/Brazoria Counties was that both IV-D court masters considered non-compliance an enforceable act, and clearly would send noncompliant NCPs to jail: the threat of “swift and certain” consequences was quite real in the two sites. Both considered the mandatory nature of the program with the sanction of jail time to be the key to success for the NCP Choices initiative. To better understand the significance of these differences and similarities, a brief description of each of the sites is presented.

### **Program Background and Design**

The players from the Galveston/Brazoria Counties come to the NCP Choices Initiative with similar backgrounds and experiences with Choices populations from work in programs and studies like Fragile Families, Welfare-to-Work, Bootstrap, and Choices, the work program for TANF recipients in Texas. The OAG is identified by all of the players involved in NCP Choices as the primary driver and facilitator for this initiative. There is also agreement that the key components in the program design include the involvement of the IV-D Courts and the sanctions for non-compliance. Most are concerned as well with problems associated with serving the population of NCP participants outside Galveston/Brazoria Counties and criteria for referring them. Noncompliant NCPs tend to have multiple, often

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<sup>53</sup> It is not clear at this point whether hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which hammered the Gulf Coast hard in early and mid-September, will adversely affect the NCP Choices implementation schedule in Galveston and Brazoria Counties.

substantial barriers to participation and employment that are going to challenge every agency and program involved in NCP Choices. Many of them are minorities and have low education levels, records as offenders, problems with substance abuse, and even other families whom they are expected to care for as well. These issues, which these programs certainly have addressed before in other efforts, surfaced during the planning phase for Galveston/Brazoria Counties and are now being faced directly in El Paso, which is also encountering basic challenges involved with instituting their communication and tracking/reporting plans across multiple agencies after 42 days of program activity.

In addition, one of the more critical features of the NCP Choices design is the active participation of the IV-D Courts, especially the judges. It is important to the success of the design and continuing NCP participation for there to be consequences when appropriate. The IV-D judges mete out such consequences for NCPs under this design. It was noteworthy that every individual interviewed as part of the field visits felt that Judge Henderson in Galveston/Brazoria and Judge Minton in El Paso were not only dedicated judges, but also the “right individuals for the job.”

### **NCP Choices Service Delivery**

The programs involved in the Galveston/Brazoria Counties all seem to have a common understanding of the NCP Choices participant flow process and expect to serve between 30 to 60 cases (NCPs) per month, depending on the actor’s perspective. They expect the Courts to offer possible participants the option of participating in the NCP Choices program. WorkSource staff will serve as on-site liaison in responsibility commitment and refer participants to WorkSource’s One-Stop Center in Texas City for actual job search services. WorkSource staff then tracks NCP Choices participants via the management information system, some details of which are being worked on to get accessibility for all players. Judge Henderson will determine outcomes at the end of the 45-day period. Galveston/Brazoria Counties anticipate providing NCP Choices participants with the very same services provided to regular customers of the Texas City One-stop system.

El Paso adopted a service delivery approach somewhat unique to their efforts under *Trabajo Andale* and the fact that DRO staff is involved as well. The actual participant flow is quite similar in any event.

## **Resources**

The resources available to each site depend very much on the multi-agency coordination aspect of the NCP Choices approach. Galveston/Brazoria Counties will have a WorkSource/court liaison or two in each of the counties. WorkSource staff anticipates using TANF funds, as well as WIA, Project RIO, tax credits, and other resources as well. El Paso's Upper Rio Grande at Work staff also plans to rely on TANF funds and possibly WIA, as appropriate, for serving NCP Choices participants; El Paso has one Upper Rio Grande at Work court liaison on site.

## **Services Provided**

The barriers that NCPs bring to this initiative have implications for service provision. NCPs frequently have poor education and work histories, are often ex-offenders, and may have problems with substance abuse and even mental illness. This array of barriers poses real challenges for serving them under NCP Choices, just as it has with other workforce and related programs. NCP Choices stresses job search and work supports over longer-term education and training. In part, this reflects the Texas primarily "work-first" orientation. Although Texas' Choices program does make training available to those who want it, only a small fraction takes advantage of the opportunity. Thus, in part the emphasis on job search and related activities for NCPs reflects an equity concern. There is a clear sense among the designers of the NCP Choices initiative that services made available to NCPs should be on a par with those offered to their counterparts, the custodial parents. This should help to avoid the concern raised by some that NCPs might avail themselves of longer-term training, deferring payment of child support while the children's mother waited with limited prospects for access to such training for herself.

*Education* levels are likely to be a problem in both sites.

Both sites basically are taking the approach that NCPs referred to their respective workforce systems will be served like any other individual who enters their doors. For most in Texas' one-stop system this means an emphasis on *job search and related services*. NCPs will be subject to greater scrutiny than other one-stop participants.

Both Galveston/Brazoria and El Paso anticipate that *transportation* will be a major problem that will need to be addressed. Few NCPs have reliable transportation and the area

labor markets are spread out geographically. Galveston and Brazoria lack public transportation systems, while El Paso's bus system is reasonably functional.

El Paso indicated that job availability for the general skill set that NCPs tend to have is going to be a serious challenge, as are mental health concerns. While El Paso can offer to refer them to mental health counseling, many participants seem resistant, according to the Upper Rio Grande at Work staff. And in both sites, mental health/illness and substance abuse treatment resources are severely limited.

### **Community Partnerships**

The workforce staffs—both WorkSource in Galveston/Brazoria Counties and Upper Rio Grande at Work in El Paso—foresee relying on linkages with community partners like Salvation Army, area food banks, and others, while other players do not anticipate such linkages.

### **Labor Market**

The labor markets in these sites are quite different. At the time of the site visits, Galveston/Brazoria WorkSource staff anticipated job opportunities expanding in chemical and oil and gas plant construction and medical fields. They felt that NCP participants would be eligible for these jobs and thought they had a good program in place to get those individuals who had been incarcerated into these positions. Concerns were raised about NCPs who were offenders or had mental health issues being able to get bonded to work in health care, although TWC provides bonding for ex-offenders working in such positions.

Upper Rio Grande at Work staff began to find that their NCP population was not a match to the areas of job growth in their area. The Upper Rio Grande at Work staff was witnessing job growth in medical, education and (security clearance required) defense-related construction but believe that the NCP participants, who on the whole are more manually inclined and with previous prison records, needed a different mix of employers and jobs in order to succeed. However, NCP Choices participants may not need to make a match to these growth areas alone, per se.

## **Initial Program Assessment**

The players from the Galveston/Brazoria Counties are limited to their opinions on the initial program assessment. The workforce board (the WorkSource) anticipates communications concerns for this multi-agency effort and foresees problems with the location and number of NCP Choices participants. While custodial parents tend to reside primarily in Harris County, NCPs live all over the Gulf Coast area, not just in Galveston or Brazoria Counties; initially, Gulf Coast plans to serve only those NCPs living in Galveston and Brazoria Counties, but they will track them when they move. WorkSource staff has concerns about the staff numbers required to manage the expected workload as well. The OAG field office is concerned about the employability of the NCP Choices target population.

El Paso has encountered real challenges during their first 42 days of implementation. The Upper Rio Grande at Work staff has concerns about the reporting and communication process and with the significant barriers to job placement and retention for the NCP Choices participants. The OAG field office is concerned about multi-agency coordination, timing elements for revoking NCP Choices participants, staff workloads, and feasibility of partial payments by the NCP Choices participants given the low wages they are likely to earn.

## **Preliminary Observations**

The following general observations are offered based on the initial review of planning and early implementation experiences in Galveston/Brazoria and El Paso Counties, as well as the literature on serving NCPs in such programs.

First, the NCP Choices model—with its emphasis on limited but clear choices, mandatory participation, and “swift and certain” consequences (i.e., jail) for NCPs failing to participate—appears consistent with the evaluation literature on such efforts and has definite “buy-in” from the key players at the state level and in each of the local sites visited. This is critical for successful implementation of the model.

Second, it is premature to judge whether the NCP Choices program will be a success. El Paso is the only site that had actually implemented the NCP Choices model at the time of the field visits in mid-to-late August. Galveston County was in the process of implementing



it in late August and Brazoria County will follow suit in October. But, at this point, all of the players seem fully engaged in and committed to project implementation.

Third, it was apparent from the field visits that there is still considerable work to be done fleshing out multi-agency coordination and communications, defining criteria about who is eligible for the program, identifying those individuals, and especially tracking and reporting NCP participation and compliance. Many of the plans were still being worked out during the visits. There is a significant information technology aspect in relation to multi-agency work that is likely to require stronger planning, training and support.

Fourth, NCPs have significant barriers to participation, employment and career advancement that may be difficult to fully address in the NCP Choices program. Helping individuals with substantial barriers—including poor education, uneven work history, substance abuse, mental health/illness, and transportation—to become economically self-sufficient and make consistent child support payments may take more than is envisioned in this initiative. There is a real mismatch between the job skills and qualifications that NCPs embody and the areas of growth in these local labor markets. On the other hand, as noted, addressing these issues through long-term training would in fact pose equity concerns with the custodial parents who are in need of child support. These are challenges that workforce development programs in these and other sites have addressed before.

Finally, as the literature has suggested, it will take time to fully implement the NCP Choices model as a pilot and to fully work out all the problems that will invariably surface. This is especially the case with a program that is based on a multi-agency coordination model.

## **IV. Preliminary Impact Analysis Plan**

Pending additional funding, the impact analysis for the Non-custodial Parent Choices program shall be conducted by the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources (RMC) of the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. The goal of providing Choices services to these unemployed and underemployed Non-custodial parents (NCPs) is to assist them in becoming responsible parents who can meet their financial and other obligations to their children. The impact analysis is designed to determine the extent to which those ordered into NCP Choices and their families benefit from the services received, in terms of increased payment of child support, as compared to similarly situated unemployed and low-income NCPs who are not offered such services.

The first section of this impact analysis plan chapter presents the research questions. Next, issues surrounding the comparison group design are discussed, including contingency plans for either a true experiment in which NCPs are randomly assigned to the NCP Choices program or a control group, or a quasi-experimental design involving selection of an appropriate comparison group. Following that are sections describing the administrative data sources that will form the core of the impact analysis, statistical analyses to be performed, and caveats or limitations of the analysis. A final section will briefly discuss important components of a complete impact analysis evaluation, but that could be scaled back or omitted should funding prove inadequate to support them. These components include a formal cost-benefit analysis and an update to the process analysis as a check on the functioning of a mature NCP Choices program.

### **Research Questions**

The proposed impact evaluation will address five research questions. The questions test for effects of being ordered into the NCP Choices program on unemployed and low-income non-custodial parents whose children are currently or formerly receiving TANF by comparing their outcomes to those of a comparison group. The comparison group will consist of similarly situated non-custodial parents who are not ordered into Choices services. As described in the following section, this comparison group will be formed through either random assignment or quasi-experimental selection procedures.

The research questions can be divided into primary and secondary outcomes. The primary outcomes relating to child support collections are of greatest interest to the OAG, as they represent potential cost savings to the child support collection system. The secondary outcomes consist of other important measures of interest, including checks on the extent to which mandating program participation succeeded, other intermediate outcomes, or other important outcomes that represent potential cost savings to entities or levels of government other than the OAG.

Research questions on the primary outcomes of interest are as follows:

1. Does the NCP Choices program, which includes mandatory, court-ordered participation in workforce development services with the threat of jail time for non-participation for non-custodial parents of children who were or are receiving welfare benefits, lead to increased child support payments?
2. Does NCP Choices lead to more *consistent* payment of child support by non-custodial parents over time?

Research questions concerning the secondary outcomes of interest are as follows:

1. Does NCP Choices lead to increased workforce development participation by non-custodial parents? Alternatively, does it lead to differential incarceration rates for non-payment of child support?
2. Does NCP Choices lead to increased employment rates and earnings levels by non-custodial parents?
3. Does NCP Choices for non-custodial parents lead to decreased TANF participation for the associated custodial parents (CPs) and their children?

These questions and the expected effects of the NCP Choices program, based on the literature reviewed earlier, are summarized in Table 2. In particular, the predictions of increased and more consistent child support collections, as well as the TANF and employment effects, are based on results of the Bootstrap Project evaluation (Schroeder, Looney, and Schexnayder, 2004) and an econometric analysis of Texas child support and poverty dynamics (Schroeder, King, and Hill, 2005).

**TABLE 2: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND EXPECTED NCP CHOICES EFFECTS**

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Expected NCP Choices effect</b>
<b>Primary Outcomes</b>	
Q1. Payment of child support.	+
Q2. Consistent payment of child support.	+
<b>Secondary Outcomes</b>	
Q3. Workforce development participation by NCP.	+
Q4. Employment and earnings of NCP.	+
Q5. Use of TANF by CP.	-

## **Comparison Group Design**

### **True Experiment**

Ideally, the impact evaluation for the NCP Choices demonstration will be conducted as a true experiment, by randomly assigning potential participants to experimental and control groups. Mandatory participation in NCP Choices would be required of experimental group members, but no Choices services would be offered to control group members. Net impacts of the demonstration would be estimated by comparing the outcomes of these two groups. When done correctly, random assignment ensures the equivalence of these two groups at the point of randomization. Any differences that emerge later between those ordered into NCP Choices and those in the control group can be confidently attributed to the mandatory NCP Choices participation requirement.

### **Quasi-Experiment**

In case a random assignment design is not feasible for the NCP Choices project demonstration, an alternative approach to comparison group selection will be utilized. Over the years, researchers have developed a number of ‘quasi-experimental’ approaches for creating counter-factual comparison groups when random assignment is not possible for

whatever reason.<sup>54</sup> Although the methods are not perfect, they represent the best approach available, aside from random assignment, for selecting near-equivalent comparison groups.

One approach to creating a ‘quasi-experimental’ comparison group that is as similar as possible to the experimental group in all measurable respects involves selection of multivariate ‘nearest neighbors.’ This involves systematically comparing each experimental group member to all potential comparison group members on a number of characteristics using a formula to compute multivariate distance. The dimensions on which they are compared typically consist of demographic, economic, program participation and other geographic characteristics. The potential comparator with the closest matching characteristics, known as the ‘nearest neighbor,’ is then selected to be in the comparison group. This process is continued until all members of the experimental group have had their own nearest neighbors chosen. Outcomes are then compared for the two groups in order to compute net impacts.<sup>55</sup> A detailed discussion of comparison group selection is provided below.

## **Comparison Group Selection**

Note that regardless of whether a true experiment or quasi-experimental design is utilized, to the extent that not everyone ordered into the program participates in Choices, neither design can be said to test for effects of the Choices program itself. This is because some who are ordered into the program will almost certainly find a job on their own, while some will find the money to make a child support payment to avoid going to jail. Thus, instead of measuring the effects of the Choices program, this impact evaluation will measure effects of a mandatory referral into the NCP Choices program, with the threat of jail time for

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<sup>54</sup> National Research Council (2001) *Evaluating Welfare Reform in an Era of Transition. Panel on Data and Methods for Measuring the Effects of Changes in Social Welfare Programs*, Robert A. Moffitt and Michele Ver Ploeg, Editors. Committee on National Statistics, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Heckman, James J. “Randomization and Social Policy Evaluations,” in *Evaluating Welfare and Training Programs*, edited by Charles F. Manski and Irwin Garfinkel, 201-230. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1992); and Heckman, James J. and Hotz, V. Joseph. “Choosing Among Alternative Nonexperimental Method for Estimating the Impact of Social Programs: The Case of Manpower Training.” *Journal of American Statistical Association*. 84(December), no. 408: 862-874. Development of appropriate nonexperimental approaches for measuring impacts of social policy demonstrations continues to be a hotly debated topic among evaluation researchers.

non-compliance. A portion of the measured effects will be due to Choices participation, and a portion will be due to the motivating properties of the court order.

The following two sections describe issues surrounding the selection of comparison groups. The section on true experiments is relatively brief, due to the advantages of this approach, while the section describing quasi-experimental comparison group selection is necessarily quite detailed because of the shortcomings of this approach.

### **True Experiment – Random Assignment**

Random assignment of potential clients to either receive a mandatory referral to NCP Choices or to the control group takes care of virtually all of the difficulties involved in creating an equivalent comparison group. Should this approach be utilized in the implementation of NCP Choices, this would greatly enhance the internal validity of the impact analysis. In other words, we could have a great deal of certainty that the mandatory order into NCP Choices itself *caused* the impacts observed. However, in order to achieve this high internal validity, an important task for impact analysis researchers would be monitoring the random assignment process and outcome to ensure that it was functioning appropriately, and thus producing similar experimental and control groups.

Several very important features of a good random assignment process would be that it has to 1) occur subsequent to the identification of *all* clients potentially eligible for mandatory referral into the program, 2) then *all* those identified as eligible would be subject to random assignment, and 3) once the die is cast, the results of the assignment must not be circumvented or re-done. Those randomly assigned to NCP Choices would be ordered into the program, and those assigned to the control group would receive no such order. Any exceptions to these rules could threaten the internal validity of the experimental design.

Under an optimal design, random assignment would place half of all selected clients into the experimental group, to receive an NCP Choices order, and half into the control group. On the other hand, it might be desirable under certain circumstances to place as many clients as possible into the program, on the assumption that the program will be beneficial for NCPs and their families. It could be methodologically acceptable to increase the proportion ordered into the program without threatening the quality of the design, provided the enrollment rates are high enough to support such an imbalanced design. If the number of

clients potentially orderable to NCP Choices is around 30 to 40 per month per site, as suggested<sup>56</sup>, the design could easily afford for 60 to 70 percent of clients to be ordered into the program, leaving only 30 to 40 percent in the control group. If, however, the number of identified potentially orderable clients falls substantially short of this goal (i.e., less than half), it might be necessary to carefully weigh the advantages of a large treatment group against considerations of how to best allocate statistical power for breaking down any effects observed. For example, the question of whether impacts vary by site would be difficult to answer if the design were too imbalanced and the sample sizes in the control group too small.

### **Quasi-Experimental Comparison Group Selection**

Should a true experimental design prove to be infeasible, the following procedures and variables will be used in the selection of nearest neighbors to comprise the quasi-experimental comparison group. The selection of nearest neighbors for the NCP Choices project begins with the identification of an appropriate pool of clients from which to choose the comparison group. Because we want members of the comparison group to be as similar as possible to those selected to be in the NCP Choices group, we will utilize the statewide database of NCPs with active child support cases as a starting point. From this, the matching procedure will consider detailed demographic and historical information on their child support collections, earnings, and other relevant information to select similarly situated NCPs, as described below.

### ***Matching Procedure***

Nearest-neighbor matching is an iterative computational process, done for one NCP Choices participant (or target) at a time, as follows. First, the initial pool of potential neighbors for the target participant is restricted to those with an exact match on important categorical dimensions, such as county of residence, for which ‘distance’ is difficult to quantify (but see discussion of geography below). Next, the target participant is compared against every remaining potential neighbor on all important near-continuous dimensions that can be measured through our administrative data sources. To objectively measure the degree of similarity between a target and potential comparator, standardized absolute distances

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<sup>56</sup> Marion Trapolino, personal communication, August 8, 2005.

between each pair on relevant dimensions are summed to arrive at a measure of total multivariate distance.<sup>57</sup> When all potential neighbors have been compared to the target, the one with the shortest distance, or the person most like the target in multivariate space, is selected as the nearest neighbor. This neighbor is retained for the comparison group, then removed from further matching consideration<sup>58</sup>, and the process is repeated for the remaining NCP Choices participants until the selection of the comparison group is complete.

### **Basic dimensions for matching**

The basic dimensions for selecting a comparison group of non-custodial parents not ordered into the NCP Choices program will consist of variables from the following categories:

- Demographics at program entry, including age, marital status, and race/ethnicity;
- Employment and earnings histories, as measured from the UI earnings database;
- Child support case features, including number and ages of children, paternity establishment history, collections history (including the current delinquency that makes the client eligible), and number of other cases on which the NCP is listed;
- Features of the custodial parent (CP) on the case to which the NCP is linked, including demographics, employment, earnings, and assistance histories, and number of other child support cases on which the CP is listed;
- Geography, as measured by county of residence (see discussion below);
- History of program participation in workforce development services;
- Furthermore, date of entry into the NCP Choices program will be controlled for implicitly by selecting comparison group members based on their characteristics as of each NCP Choices group member's entry date.

### **Geographic considerations**

As implied above, the ideal comparison group would perfectly control for geography, and the associated labor market issues, by selecting all comparators from the same

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<sup>57</sup> See P.C. Mahalanobis, "On the Generalized Distance in Statistics," *Proceedings of the National Institute of Science of India Series A*, Volume 2, (1936), pp 49-55.

<sup>58</sup> This is known as sampling without replacement, and it prevents the same comparator being selected for the comparison group multiple times. While it is possible to sample *with* replacement and get slightly better matches, this requires a complex adjustment to the standard errors, and can lead to the undesirable situation of having one person serve as comparator for a large number of treatment group members.



geographic areas as the NCP Choices group members with whom they are paired. There could be a problem with this approach, however, in the case where essentially all of those in the program areas eligible for the program are in fact ordered into the program. If this were to happen, it would cause the pool of potential comparison group members in the same areas to be essentially empty, and it would force the evaluators to select comparison group members from other areas not served by NCP Choices, or from the same areas at other points in time. This would not be desirable, for it is highly unlikely that these other areas would have the same labor market and other local characteristics that will prove very important to the employment outcomes attainable by a set of generally low-skilled NCPs. If the other alternatives prove infeasible and the design requires selection from other areas, we will add to the set of matching dimensions a number of measures of local labor market characteristics, such as unemployment and employment growth rates, that will help to minimize the negative aspects of this approach. It might also be appropriate, under these circumstances, to have an additional comparison group consisting of all NCPs statewide whose characteristics would make them eligible for NCP Choices, had they been in the right areas to receive such an order.

### ***Balancing Tests***

Since under the scenario of a quasi-experimental evaluation, the results hinge critically on differences in outcomes for NCP Choices participants and those of the comparison group, it is important to ensure that the groups are as equivalent as possible before any services are received. Researchers could expect to observe, if the comparison group selection were done well, that the measurable characteristics of the groups at program entry should differ only by chance. In order to test whether the characteristics of the groups differ at a level that could be explained by chance alone, RMC researchers will perform balancing tests on the means of continuous variables and proportions of qualitative variables that describe the groups. It is expected that few or no significant differences would be found.<sup>59</sup> If differences are found between the comparison group and the NCP Choices group,

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<sup>59</sup> Due to the nature of statistical inference, when using a 95 percent confidence level one can expect to find approximately one spurious difference for every twenty comparisons made. This is because the probability of a type I error (concluding there is a difference when in fact no difference exists) is 0.05. Due to the large number of comparisons involved in these tests, researchers should only be

options for refining the comparison group match procedure will be examined. Regardless of whether or not the selection procedure is refined, any remaining slight differences between the groups can to a large extent be controlled for statistically, as described later.

### ***Match Refinement***

In case the measurable pre-program differences between NCP Choices participants and the quasi-experimental comparison group members are too great to ignore, a number of methods will be used to refine the nearest-neighbor selection procedure. These methods are listed below. In each case, the test of whether the refinement was successful will be to re-compute the balancing tests described above to see if the change resulted in reduced pre-program differences between the groups.

#### **Adding dimensions**

One method of refinement could be applied to enhance the quasi-experimental matching procedure through inclusion of additional descriptive variables. Although one would not expect the multivariate distances to be reduced simply by including more dimensions, one could strategically choose to add dimensions to address a deficiency that results from matching using the existing set of dimensions. Thus, for example, if the comparison group was found to have greater work experience than the NCP Choices group but was comparable on most other dimensions, one could enhance the match procedure by adding one or more dimensions that either directly or indirectly relate to work experience.

#### **Weighted multivariate matching**

Following the logic of the prior section, this method of refining the matching procedure would allow some dimensions to carry more weight than others in the determination of nearest neighbors. As described thus far, the computation of multivariate distance treats all dimensions as equally important, and this is to some extent justified because only important dimensions are included. However, the method could be improved by recognizing that within this set of important dimensions, some are still more important than others. For example, although both are important, child support collections history is a

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concerned if the number of statistically significant differences exceeds that which could be expected due to chance alone.

much better predictor of future child support collections than is age. A scheme that gives greater weight to the collections history dimension would ensure that, all else being equal, the chosen neighbors would be more similar on the most important dimensions, and less similar on less important ones.

This weighting of the matching dimensions would essentially incorporate the one major advantage of a similar method, known as ‘propensity score matching<sup>60</sup>,’ into the nearest-neighbor method without the disadvantages that propensity score matching entails.<sup>61</sup> Following the work of Zhao (2004) and Hollenbeck, Schroeder, King, and Huang (2003, 2005), we will implement this procedure by weighting the dimensions with their absolute standardized regression coefficients from a logistic regression predicting NCP Choices program participation among those eligible.

### **Caliper matching**

Finally, if the above refinement methods have been exhausted and the quasi-experimental comparison group still does not pass the balancing tests, RMC researchers may decide that some small percentage of the NCP Choices group have combinations of features that makes finding matches for them difficult. Such people would be objectively identified solely by the large multivariate distances that remain between them and their selected nearest neighbors. The matching procedure as described thus far retains the nearest neighbor in the control group regardless of how near that neighbor actually is. However, if those with the most distant neighbors are removed from the analysis, a process known as ‘caliper matching,’ greater comparability between the groups can be achieved.

If it is deemed necessary to implement caliper matching, it will be with full recognition of the tradeoffs of this approach. First, it would result in a reduced sample size, and hence reduced statistical power, which translates as a reduced likelihood of detecting an NCP Choices effect if one truly exists. Second, there would be some minimal loss in

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<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Rosenbaum, P. and Rubin, D. “The Central Role of the Propensity Score in Observational Studies for Causal Effects.” *Biometrika*. 70(April 1983), pp. 41-55.

<sup>61</sup> The propensity scoring method is arguably inferior because it ignores a great deal of information that should be useful for creating near-equivalent comparison groups. It does so by reducing a large number of dimensions to one numerical score that is meant to represent the tendency (or propensity) to self-select into the program. It is difficult to ascertain whether 1) one has identified and measured all important predictors of self-selection, and 2) any information useful for matching remains from the many dimensions beyond their degree of covariation with self-selection.

generalizability of findings, since conclusions could only be justifiably applied to groups that do not contain people like those who were excluded by the application of a caliper. Finally, the significant gain that would offset these losses would be increased internal validity, or confidence in knowing that any post-program outcome differences were due to the NCP Choices program itself, and not to pre-existing differences between the groups.

## **Administrative Data Sources**

### **Outcomes to be Measured**

Regardless of whether a true experiment or a quasi-experimental design is selected, the analysis will answer the research questions by performing statistical tests on administrative data gathered to measure the outcomes of interest. Performance of these statistical tests requires data not only on the outcomes, but also on the measurable characteristics of the cases and clients in the NCP Choices and control groups. Table 3 briefly summarizes the variables to be analyzed and the data sources from which they are to be obtained.

**TABLE 3: SPECIFIC OUTCOMES TO BE ANALYZED**

<b>Outcomes to be Analyzed</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
<b>Primary outcomes</b>	
Payment of child support; consistent payment of child support	OAG collections data
<b>Secondary outcomes</b>	
Workforce development participation by NCP	TWC administrative data for Choices, WIA, FSE&T, and/or One-stop registration programs <sup>62</sup>
Incarceration rates for non-payment of child support	OAG case data (if adequate to support this measure)
Employment and earnings of NCP	TWC quarterly UI earnings records
Use of TANF by CP	HHSC administrative data

<sup>62</sup> Since it will be important to know whether similar services are received by members of the control group, we will explore the feasibility of including these other workforce development data sources.

## **Period of Study**

Pending availability from the various administrative sources, individual level data will be collected from as early August 2003, or at least two years prior to the initial NCP Choices participation. Data collection will continue through the maximum follow-up period allowable under the as-yet unspecified agreement to conduct the impact analysis, while still allowing sufficient time at the end of the study to gather and process data, interpret results, and draw conclusions. Ideally, clients will be ordered into the NCP Choices program for at least one year (though continuing enrollment beyond that time would be a bonus), and the follow-up period for these first-year participants would allow one to two years for the benefits of workforce development participation to accrue. Utilization of shorter study intervals than this would be likely to bias the design against the possibility of finding positive program effects.

## **Identifier Issues**

Due to heavy reliance on client social security numbers (SSN) for linking across administrative data sources, persons whose SSNs are missing or invalid will necessarily be dropped from all analysis. Since both the NCP Choices participants and the control group members will be drawn from the OAG caseload, this is not expected to be a significant problem. SSN completion rates in the OAG case and client data have historically been adequate for this purpose.<sup>63</sup>

## **Agencies Supplying Administrative Data**

The following sections of text provide details of the administrative data to be collected from each agency or department.

### ***Texas Office of the Attorney General***

In Texas, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) is the IV-D agency responsible for helping custodial parents to receive child support from the non-custodial parent of their children. The OAG has developed automated data systems to facilitate the administration of

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example, "Impacts of Workforce Services for Young, Low-Income Fathers: Findings from the Texas Bootstrap Project," (2004). Daniel Schroeder, Sarah Looney, and Deanna Schexnayder, Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, The University of Texas at Austin

this program. These data systems include archival detail on support orders, paternity establishments, enforcement actions, case demographics, amounts of support paid and owed by non-custodial parents, and share of the support collected that is disbursed to the state and custodial parent. The data are keyed to OAG client and case numbers that can easily be linked to NCP and CP SSNs for linking to other data sources. We will also explore the availability of OAG administrative data that could be used to measure incarceration rates for non-payment of child support, both for NCP Choices participants and for control group members.

### ***Health and Human Services Commission***

The data source for tracking receipt of government benefits, such as TANF, will be the administrative files produced by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC, formerly the Texas Department of Human Services). For TANF and related programs, HHSC maintains monthly snapshots of the recipient client and caseloads. These serve as the main source of information regarding who received what benefits in what time periods. They can be supplemented by warrant data that list case-level information on TANF benefit amounts paid, and which take into account changes that occur after the monthly snapshot files are created. Clients are identified in these sources by an HHSC client number as well as by SSN, and they are linked to case level information through program-specific case numbers.

### ***Texas Workforce Commission***

#### **Unemployment Insurance Wage Data**

As part of the administration of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) requires covered employers to report the amount of pay they give each employee each quarter. The data identify each employee by social security number (SSN), and are thus easily linked to members of the NCP Choices and control groups. It should be noted that although other earnings data sources may be available from TWC's information systems, these sources can not be expected to measure earnings well for those not participating in NCP Choices (i.e., control group members). To the extent

that such sources are available, they may be used for descriptive purposes only, but will not be relied upon for impact estimation.

### **Workforce Development Participation Data**

TWC administers a number of workforce development programs that offer education, training, and job search services to low-income or unemployed persons. Some of these programs track clients' levels of participation, in the form of actual days or hours spent in the activities, as well as activities participated in, while others only provide date ranges. The programs for which workforce participation data will be collected include:

- Choices (formerly JOBS) program data,
- Workforce Investment Act (WIA, formerly JTPA) data,
- Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSE&T) data, and
- One-stop registration data.

Although it is unlikely that unemployed NCPs will appear in significant numbers in most of these programs (aside from NCP Choices participation, and possibly One-stop services for control group members), it is important that these data be accessed in order to confirm the expected low level of workforce development participation among members of the control group.

### ***Other NCP Choices Program Data***

At this point little is known about what data systems will be used by entities involved in this project to collect information on NCP Choices participants and control group members. Depending upon the details of program implementation, it may be necessary to collect information from these sources in order to monitor intake and participation data on all NCP Choices participants. Exploration of these data sources will constitute an early task for the impact analysis.

## **Analyses to be Performed**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Prior to computation of any statistical inferences, the data must be inspected for anomalous observations, coverage, and overall quality. As a diagnostic tool, tabulations of the number of observations, missing values, maximum and minimum values, and variance will be produced for all variables. Whenever possible, these summary measures will be compared to similar published statistics.

For variables of particular interest, monthly or quarterly plots and other diagnostics will be produced to give an overall feeling for trends and turning points. Some of these time series will become inputs to further analysis, but some will be purely diagnostic.

### **Net Effect Estimation**

The control group design justifies the application of a large body of accepted statistical methods designed for estimating the net effects of experiments and quasi-experiments. RMC researchers will use these standard techniques to estimate net effects of the NCP Choices project on the various hypothesized outcomes listed above. The analysis will include the estimation of *unadjusted* and *adjusted net effects* through linear regression or other more complex statistical procedures. The unadjusted net effect is simply the difference between mean outcomes for the NCP Choices and control groups. Adjusted net effects are also computed in order to 1) adjust this impact measure by controlling for the slight differences between the pre-program attributes of the NCP Choices and control groups that inevitably occur, even under random assignment, and to 2) estimate impacts more precisely, with smaller standard errors compared to simple post-treatment difference in means.

The results of the statistical analysis will be reported in a table similar in form to Table 4. In most cases, the means in this table will be computed for monthly or quarterly observations. The measures listed are illustrative only, and are not meant to be exhaustive.



**TABLE 4. EXAMPLE OF IMPACT REPORT TABLES**

Measure	Post-treatment Mean		Unadjusted Difference	Adjusted Net Effect
	NCP Choices	Control		
<b>Primary Outcomes</b>				
Percent paying any child support				
Percent of time paying child support				
Percent consistently paying child support				
<b>Secondary Outcomes</b>				
Percent participating in any workforce development activities				
Percent incarcerated for non-payment of child support				
Percent of time employed				
Average quarterly earnings, of those employed				
Percent of time receiving TANF				

The numbers in the last two columns of Table 4 are parameters that represent the estimated impact of the NCP Choices project. One column contains the simple unadjusted effect, and the rightmost column the adjusted net effect, which statistically controls for participant features at program entry.

**Specification of Statistical Measures**

The following sections describe the statistical measures that will be used to answer each of the research questions in Table 2.

***Child Support Collections***

The most important outcome expected from the NCP Choices project is an increase in frequency, level, and consistency of payment of child support obligations. Child support collections will be measured in a number of ways. Some of these measures will be reported and some may be regarded as exploratory. Frequency of child support payment will be measured by the proportion of post-program months in which any payments are made.

Second, level of payments will be measured as the average or mean monthly amount of those payments. Third, as an alternative to the second measure, the percent of time clients pay their entire obligation per month may be computed. And finally, measures of *consistent* payment of child support will be created by computing the proportion of participants making any payments in at least two out of every three months, and the percent paying in all three out of every three months.<sup>64</sup>

### ***Participation in Workforce Development***

Participation in workforce development services can be regarded as both an early impact of the NCP Choices program and as a ‘manipulation check,’ testing whether the order, or mandatory referral process succeeded in getting most clients into Choices services, and whether the level of participation in workforce development services in general was greater than what NCPs in the control group may have managed to find on their own. Regarding the measure as an early impact, it is important to recall, as discussed previously, that the study measures the impact of being ordered into NCP Choices, but not necessarily the impact of actual receipt of Choices services. For this purpose, participation data will be measured separately for Choices and for all the other listed programs combined, including Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Welfare-to-Work (WtW), Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSE&T), and One-stop registration programs. The simplest measures would be indicators that take a value of one in months when the client participates in a program, and zero otherwise. These measures will be analyzed to determine whether increased rates of participation are observed. If the mandatory referral process is operating effectively, one should expect to see drastically increased rates of participation in Choices among NCP Choices clients, relative to controls. Examination of patterns for the other workforce development programs would indicate whether this elevated participation rate in Choices was the result of reaching more people, as designed, or simply resulted from substituting Choices for other available services. The answers to questions such as these provide important context for interpreting the primary results of the study.

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<sup>64</sup> These consistency measures were developed and refined in Schroeder, Looney, & Schexnayder (2004).

### ***Employment and Earnings***

Previous work in the area of welfare and employment has shown that UI wage data are likely to be superior to self reported income data; therefore, UI wages will be used to measure employment and earnings.<sup>65</sup> UI wage data cover over 95 percent of all employment in the state of Texas. Some jobs are not covered (including self-employment, and most agricultural employment), and some employers arguably under-report their employees to avoid taxes. Any underreporting due to these reasons should fall approximately equally on both the NCP Choices and control groups. It should be noted that, due to the reporting delays in the UI system, a substantial follow-up interval will be necessary in order to statistically detect any potential NCP Choices effect on employment and earnings.

The simplest measure of employment is a variable taking the value of one if the client earned any non-zero wages in a given quarter and zero otherwise.<sup>66</sup> Taking the mean of this variable for a group of individuals over time gives a measure of the percent of time employed for that group. As with other measures, the difference in the percent of time employed between the NCP Choices and comparison groups is the employment impact of the program.

In order to treat the question of earnings level as distinct from the question of employment, mean earnings will only be analyzed for those who are employed (often referred to as ‘conditional’ earnings). The average amount earned by clients in the NCP Choices group will be compared to the average amount earned by those in the control group. This restriction of earnings measurement to those who are employed gives an assessment of whether the NCP Choices program had an effect on employed participants’ ability to earn *higher* wages.

### ***Receipt of TANF***

Receipt of TANF benefits by the custodial parent(s) will be summarized by computing the percent of post-program months in which benefits were received. This will be done by computing a variable at the person-month level that takes the value of one for

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<sup>65</sup> As noted above, although other sources of earnings and job placement data may be available, they can not be used for measuring program impacts because they will only be measured well for Choices or other program participants, leaving gaps in the employment picture for control group members.

<sup>66</sup> It is also common to define employment as having earnings greater than \$100 in a given quarter, since those who earn less than this are not required to be reported to the UI system.

months in which the person is receiving TANF, and zero otherwise. The mean of this variable computed over an interval provides an estimate of the percent of time receiving TANF. This approach reduces a great deal of information into just a few numbers. The combined effects of changes in entries into this program, exits, and recidivism are all summarized in this single statistic. Percent of time receiving TANF will be compared between the NCP Choices and control groups.

### **Subgroup Analysis**

In addition to computing the overall effects of being ordered into the NCP Choices program, it is also desirable to know to what extent the overall effects vary when broken down by different subgroups. It would be informative to know, for example, whether the overall NCP Choices effect varies by site, considering the existence of slight differences among the sites' procedures, as documented above, and especially the cultural, geographical, and labor market differences among the sites. The expected rates of intake in the four sites, estimated at 30 to 40 eligible for referral per month per site, should allow enrollment of sufficient numbers of participants to support this type of subgroup analysis, as well as any other subgroups of potential interest.

### **Caveats and Limitations of Analysis**

A number of caveats could apply to the results of the proposed impact analysis, depending in part on design choices, potential unintended features of the program, and other factors. Several of these have been mentioned previously. The decision whether to utilize a true experiment or rely on a quasi-experimental comparison group, for example, determines several caveats. If random assignment is used to assign potential participants to NCP Choices or to the control group, the ability to confidently infer that the program caused the outcomes observed will be greatly enhanced, but will still depend on the integrity of the assignment and tracking procedures. It is also important to note what random assignment will not do. As noted previously, random assignment will not reveal the effect of *receiving* Choices services, since it is likely that not everyone referred will receive such services – some will find jobs on their own and some will go to jail. Any comparison involving only those who actually receive Choices services will be biased due to non-random loss of participants between the time of referral and participation. Instead, the study will estimate

the effect of *being ordered into* a program with mandatory participation in Choices with a threat of jail time for those who do not either comply or get a job. This is not a terrible restriction, however, since in any valid application of these results to the real world, we would have to account for the fact of self-diversion of clients between referral and participation. There might be theoretical interest in knowing the effect of Choices services on NCPs, but such knowledge would have no practical application without a method of getting them into such services.

Another common mistake in the interpretation of results from a random assignment study is to assume that all effects are causal, when in fact only those factors that are directly randomly assigned can be interpreted as causal. Consider, for example, the proposed subgroup analysis involving effects calculated separately by site. If random assignment of potential clients to NCP Choices is used at all the sites, and different effect sizes are observed for different sites, we can be confident that NCP Choices caused the effects in each of the sites, but we will not know what *caused* the effect for Site A to be different from the effect for Site B. Since there is no random assignment of people and other factors to sites, we can only speculate as to why the NCP Choices program has different effects in different sites.

If quasi-experimental selection is used instead to create the comparison group, a different set of caveats applies. Most importantly, the ability to draw causal conclusions is no longer guaranteed; instead, the results of a well done quasi-experiment can suggest but not prove a causal connection between the NCP Choices program and the outcomes observed. Furthermore, the strength of this conclusion will depend on the ability of researchers to identify a comparison group that is as equivalent as possible to the NCP Choices group just before being ordered into the program. Thus, for example, if under this design the sites outreach a fraction of those potentially eligible to be ordered into NCP Choices, and leave out a significant fraction of similarly situated NCPs in the same areas, these conditions may be conducive to the selection of a good comparison group. If, on the other hand, the sites select all of those eligible for NCP Choices within a given area, researchers will be forced to choose a comparison group from other areas of the state and/or other periods of time. In this case the equivalence of the comparison group will be questionable since not all aspects of different labor markets and different time periods can be well understood and accounted for statistically. A similar situation will apply if the sites choose only a fraction of those eligible,

but those they choose are on average different (e.g., more employable, etc.) from those they do not choose. In any of these cases, a non-equivalent comparison group would reduce our confidence in concluding that the NCP Choices program is associated with and to some degree responsible for the effects observed.

Another potential caveat concerns the to-be-determined length of the study period and its relationship to the effects that could be observed. Some of the effects that a workforce development program such as this could be expected to produce might be extended over time. For example, while one may observe greater participation in workforce development services almost immediately, any down-line effects of NCP Choices on employment and earnings, and further down-line to the most important outcome – child support collections, would take longer to accrue. For this reason, it is recommended that the study period be at least two to three years – enough time to allow effects to accrue, data to be collected (including a significant lag in the collection of employment/earnings data), and results to be processed. A shorter study period would be likely to limit the effects that could be observed.

Another issue that could affect the observed impacts of the NCP Choices program is one that frequently arises in early implementation of new programs. Many problems can arise early in the implementation process, regardless of how well-planned a program might have been. These could be kinks in the process that are soon worked-out, or other problems that simply could not have been foreseen. Regardless of the source of the problems, the preferred response is to omit from analysis any data that arises from the early implementation phase by ignoring the first few months of participants.

## **Other Research Components**

Two additional research components are highly recommended as part of a complete impact analysis evaluation. First, since the NCP Choices program was just getting underway when the preliminary process evaluation was conducted, it is quite likely that new issues will emerge as implementation begins in the three sites that had not yet begun ordering NCPs into the program as of August 2005. Furthermore, the potential implementation of a random assignment component could create additional issues, as would simple maturation of the program as the involved parties begin to fall into routines that could evolve over time. To keep track of these changes, and to understand how the issues they create affect the

conclusions that can be drawn from the impact analysis, it is recommended that the impact analysis include an update to the preliminary process analysis as a check on the functioning of a mature NCP Choices program.

Another research component that is important but not absolutely critical for inclusion in the impact analysis is a formal cost-benefit analysis. While the impact analysis as described can accurately estimate what degree of benefit accrues per client ordered into the program, in terms of dollars of child support collections, earnings, or reduced TANF per month, it will not indicate whether these benefits are greater than what the program cost. A cost-benefit analysis identifies costs to the OAG, to other local entities, state agencies, or the federal government, and to society in general, and weighs these against the measurable economic benefits of the program. Should funding prove adequate to support this research component, we highly recommend its inclusion in the impact analysis so that overall cost-effectiveness of the NCP Choices program can be estimated.

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## **Appendix A**

### **List of Key NCP Choices Contacts**

#### **Texas Office of the Attorney General**

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Marion Trapolino, Family Initiatives, Office of Family and Legal Policy

#### **Texas Workforce Commission**

Nicole Verver, Director, Workforce Policy, Workforce Development Division

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Judge Doretha Henderson, IV-D Associate Judge

Michael Wise, Region 6 Field Regional Administrator, OAG

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#### **El Paso County/Upper Rio Grande Area**

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Antonio Rodriguez, OAG Child Support Division, El Paso

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Janet Bono, Upper Rio Grande at Work Workforce Board

Javier Veloz, Business Development Specialist, Upper Rio Grande at Work Workforce Board

Irma Ornelas, SERCO Program Coordinator

Marisela Saldana, SERCO Supervisor

## Appendix B

### NCP Choices Project Field Interview Guide

#### Office of the Attorney General Guide

##### *Introduction*

*Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. We are from the Ray Marshall Center and we would like to discuss the NCP Choices program. We'll be going through some questions to gather information about the program and, as we do so, would appreciate it if you could provide us with any related supporting documentation, forms or other written material.*

#### **A. Local CSE Background**

Tell me a little about your local child support enforcement program...

1. About how many families do you serve each year?
2. About how much child support do you collect annually?
3. Has your office experimented with alternative approaches in the past?
  - How successful have the approaches been?
4. Do you have a history of working with workforce, supportive services?
  - Have these past collaborations been successful?
5. What type of employment related programs/services did you refer people to before the NCP Choices program?
6. How long has (judge) \_\_\_\_\_ been working directly with CSE?

#### **B. Program Background**

1. What led to the establishment of the NCP Choices program in your area?
2. When was (will) the local Choices program (be) fully implemented?
3. Could you describe your program planning process?
  - When did you start?
  - Who was involved?
4. How have your past experiences influenced the development of the NCP Choices program locally?

#### **C. NCP Choices Service Delivery**

*We would like to discuss the program process next. We have created a flow chart of the expected process and would appreciate it if you would refer to the chart as we go through the discussion and let us know how the process differs from this model. (provide with flow chart)*

1. Describe the overall Choices program you've developed
  - What are the key steps in the process?
  - How do NCPs end up in court?
2. What criteria do you use to determine Choices eligibility?

- Do you anticipate that your eligibility criteria will prevent you from enrolling anyone?
  - Do you anticipate changing the eligibility criteria during the course of the program?
3. How many NCPs do you foresee serving in NCP Choices?
    - What percent do you expect to pay their obligations rather than participate in the program?
    - What percent do you expect to go to jail rather than participate in the program?
    - Do you expect any of the hearings to result in a change to the NCPs' CS order (e.g. a decrease due to unemployment, etc.)?
    - Do you anticipate that the NCPs will have legal counsel?
      - i. Will this likely affect their decision regarding whether to participate in the Choices program?
  4. Do you plan to offer any incentives for participation?
  5. How will you track whether NCPs ordered into the program actually participate?
    - Do you have an information management system that you will use to monitor progress?
    - How do you share information with the workforce agency and with the court?
      - i. Is there a form that you use? (If so, request a copy of the form)
    - How often will you be checking on the progress of NCPs?
  6. Do you have a process for NCPs who are not meeting their workforce commitments?
    - Who is responsible for following up with these participants?
    - What do you expect to be the major challenges in achieving compliance with program guidelines/commitments?

#### **D. Resources**

1. How many OAG staff people are directly involved in operating the NCP Choices project?
2. How much staff time will you devote to the project?
3. Are you planning to use any local funding other than IVD?

#### **E. Services Provided**

1. What types of services do you think that NCPs are going to need for the program to be effective?
2. What types of services are you planning to provide?
3. Have you had any special projects for serving the NCP population in the past?

#### **F. Community Partnerships**

1. Do you plan to partner with others in this process?
  - Have you formed any partnerships? Why? For what?
  - Were there any organizations that you attempted to foster relationships with that failed? Why?
2. Do partners have training and/or experience working with...

- ...NCPs?
- ...men?
- ...young men?
- ...low-income populations?

**G. Initial Program Assessment**

1. Do you anticipate making adjustments during the course of the program?
2. What do you think about the design of the program?
  - What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
3. What challenges do you foresee?
4. What best practices have you learned during the initial program implementation that you would you suggest to other regions considering starting this kind of initiative?
  - What practices would you suggest they avoid?

**H. Additional Feedback**

1. Additional feedback?

*Finally, do you have any additional forms or supporting documents related to any aspects of the NCP Choices program that we have discussed today?*

*Thank you.*

## Court Guide

### *Introduction*

*Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. We are from the Ray Marshall Center and we would like to discuss the NCP Choices program. We'll be going through some questions to gather information about the program and, as we do so, would appreciate it if you could provide us with any related supporting documentation, forms or other written material.*

### **A. Local CSE Background**

Tell me a little about your local child support enforcement program...

1. Have experimented with alternative approaches in the past?
  - How successful have the approaches been?
2. Do you have a history of working with workforce, supportive services?
  - Have these past collaborations been successful?
3. How long have you been working with the OAG on this issue?

### **B. Program Background**

1. What led to the establishment of the NCP Choices program in your area?
2. When was (will) the local Choices program (be) fully implemented?
3. Could you describe your program planning process?
  - When did you start?
  - Who was involved?
4. How have your past experiences influenced the development of the NCP Choices program locally?

### **C. NCP Choices Service Delivery**

*We would like to discuss the program process next. We have created a flow chart of the expected process and would appreciate it if you would refer to the chart as we go through the discussion and let us know how the process differs from this model. (provide with flow chart)*

1. Describe the overall Choices program you've developed
  - What are the key steps in the process?
  - How do NCPs end up in court?
  - How often do you hold dockets specifically for the NCP Choices program?
2. What percent of NCPs do you expect to participate in the program?
  - What percent do you expect to pay their obligations rather than participate in the program?
  - What percent do you expect to go to jail rather than participate in the program?
  - Do you expect any of the hearings to result in a change to the NCPs' CS order (e.g. a decrease due to unemployment, etc.)?
  - Do you anticipate that the NCPs will have legal counsel?



- i. Will this likely affect their decision regarding whether to participate in the Choices program?
3. How will you track whether NCPs ordered into the program actually participate?
  - Do you have an information management system that you will use to monitor progress?
  - How do you share information with the workforce agency and with the OAG?
    - i. Is there a form that you use? (If so, request a copy of the form)
  - How often will you be checking on the progress of NCPs?
4. Do you have a process for NCPs who are not meeting their workforce commitments?
  - Who is responsible for following up with these participants?
  - What do you expect to be the major challenges in achieving compliance with program guidelines/commitments?

**D. Resources**

1. Do you have particular staff assigned to working on this project?

**E. Services Provided**

1. What types of services do you think that NCPs are going to need?

**F. Community Partnerships**

1. Do you plan to partner with others in this process?
  - Have you formed any partnerships? Why? For what?
  - Were there any organizations that you attempted to foster relationships with that failed? Why?

**G. Initial Program Assessment**

1. Do you anticipate making adjustments during the course of the program?
2. What do you think about the design of the program?
  - What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
3. What challenges do you foresee?
4. What best practices have you learned during the initial program implementation that you would you suggest to other regions considering starting this kind of initiative?
  - What practices would you suggest they avoid?

**H. Additional Feedback**

1. Additional feedback?

*Finally, do you have any additional forms or supporting documents related to any aspects of the NCP Choices program that we have discussed today?*

*Thank you.*

# Workforce Development Agency Guide

## *Introduction*

*Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. We are from the Ray Marshall Center and we would like to discuss the NCP Choices program. We'll be going through some questions to gather information about the program and, as we do so, would appreciate it if you could provide us with any related supporting documentation, forms or other written material.*

### **A. Program Background**

1. How did you get involved with the local Choices program?
2. When was (will) the local Choices program (be) fully implemented?
3. Could you describe your program planning process?
  - When did you start?
  - Who was involved?
4. Do you have a history of working with the Office of the Attorney General?
  - Have these past collaborations been successful?
5. How have your past experiences influenced the development of the NCP Choices program locally?
6. What type of employment related programs/services did this organization provide/refer people to for NCPs before the Choices program?

### **B. NCP Choices Service Delivery**

*We would like to discuss the program process next. We have created a flow chart of the expected process and would appreciate it if you would refer to the chart as we go through the discussion and let us know how the process differs from this model. (provide with flow chart)*

1. Describe the overall Choices program you've developed
  - What are the key steps in the process?
2. How many NCPs do you foresee serving in NCP Choices?
3. How will you track whether NCPs ordered into the program actually participate?
  - Do you have an information management system that you will use to monitor progress?
    - i. How do you share information with the OAG and with the court?
      1. Describe your compliance reporting process (to the court and OAG)?
      2. Is there a form that you use? (If so, request a copy of the form)
  - How often will you be checking on the progress of NCPs?
  - Are you involved in the sanction process?
4. Did you offer any incentives for participation?
5. Do NCPs meet the eligibility criteria for all of your programs?

### **C. Resources**

1. How many staff people are directly involved in operating the NCP Choices project?
2. How much staff time will be devoted to the project?

3. What are your funding sources?

#### **D. Services Provided**

1. What types of services do you think that NCPs are going to need?
2. How do you assess what workforce services are needed?
3. What types of workforce services are provided? And by whom?
  - Job placement assistance?
  - Job training?
  - On-the-job training?
  - Basic adult education?
  - GED?
  - Job readiness/ Pre-employment skills?
  - Mentoring?
  - ESL?
  - Other?
4. What kinds of supportive services are provided? And by whom?
  - Family care?
  - Transportation?
  - Housing/Rental Assistance?
  - Substance abuse treatment?
  - IDAs?
5. Do federal, state or local performance measures limit the types of services you are able to provide NCPs under the Choices program?

#### **E. Community Partnerships**

1. Do you plan to partner with others in this process?
  - Have you formed any partnerships? Why? For what?
  - Were there any organizations that you attempted to foster relationships with that failed? Why?
2. How do you plan to foster relationships with referral agencies? (Mutual site visits, staff training, cross-program staff interaction, peer-learning colleges?)
3. Do partners have training and/or experience working with...
  - ...NCPs?
  - ...men?
  - ...young men?
  - ...low-income populations?
4. Were staff members educated on the complex issues that face low-income NCPs?
5. Are the various organizations providing Choices services accessible via public transportation?
  - If not, do you provide transportation assistance?

#### **F. Labor Market**

##### General

1. How would you assess the economy in this area?

2. How would you assess the current job market for workers similar to the NCP population?
3. What are the major areas of employment growth in the region?
4. How has the economy changed in the last few years?

#### Workforce

1. Have you built relationships with any of the major employers in the region that aid in job placement?
2. In what types of positions do you place most workforce participants?
3. What is the range of starting salaries for workforce participants?
4. How is job retention for workforce participants?
5. Are workforce participants generally able to advance in the companies?

#### NCPs

1. What types of positions will be the easiest for NCPs to access?
  - In what types of positions do you anticipate placing NCPs?
2. What are the major challenges that low-income NCPs face in finding work?
3. How long do you expect NCPs will need to use your services before finding a job?
4. What do you anticipate the earnings potential of NCPs will be?
  - Do you think that accessing workforce services will allow NCPs to improve their earning potential?
5. What factors may affect the ability of NCPs to find and retain positions?

#### **G. Initial Program Assessment**

1. Do you anticipate making adjustments during the course of the program?
2. What do you think about the design of the program?
  - What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
3. What challenges do you foresee?
4. What best practices have you learned during the program implementation that you would you suggest to other regions considering starting this kind of initiative?
  - What practices would you suggest they avoid?

#### **Additional Feedback**

1. Additional feedback?

*Finally, do you have any additional forms or supporting documents related to any aspects of the NCP Choices program that we have discussed today?*

*Thank you.*