

PROJECT OVERVIEW



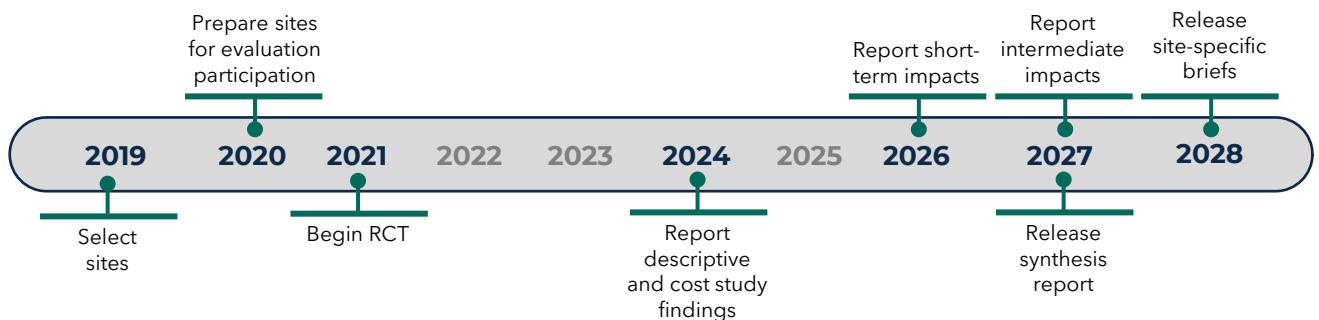
The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the federal Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has spent decades studying strategies to help people with low incomes find and keep jobs. To further build this evidence, OPRE contracted with Mathematica to conduct the Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) Project. **The goal of the NextGen Project is to study innovative programs for people facing complex barriers to employment.** NextGen is part of OPRE’s Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio, which seeks to rigorously evaluate the “next generation” of employment strategies for people with low incomes, and is partnering with the Social Security Administration (SSA) on select evaluations.

DETAILS

- The NextGen Project includes **implementation, cost, and impact studies** for five innovative employment programs, as well as briefs on special topics.
- NextGen uses **a randomized controlled trial (RCT)** design to estimate each program’s impact. Eligible program participants are randomly assigned to a program group that can receive program services, or a comparison group that cannot receive program services but can receive other employment services available in the community. This evaluation design gives us confidence that any differences in outcomes between program group and comparison group members were caused by the program.
- The project team is administering **surveys to study participants** and collecting **administrative data** on participants’ **employment and other outcomes related to economic self-sufficiency and well-being**. Using these survey responses and data, Mathematica will compare the short-term and intermediate outcomes of program and comparison group members to estimate each program’s effectiveness.
- The NextGen project will **share lessons learned from the evaluation broadly**.

TIMELINE

The study began in October 2018 and most programs began enrolling study participants in 2021. Findings from the descriptive and cost studies are expected in fall 2024. Findings on the short-term impacts of the programs are expected in 2026, and intermediate findings in 2027.



PROGRAMS INVOLVED IN THE NEXTGEN PROJECT

- **Bridges from School to Work (Bridges)** helps young adults (ages 17 to 24) with disabilities find work as they transition out of high school. Most Bridges participants begin working with the program while they are still in high school and have little or no previous employment experience. Bridges pairs each program participant with an employment specialist, who work together to help the participant prepare for work, find a job, and stay employed. Bridges offers retention support for one year after a participant begins working.
- **Individual Placement and Support for Adults with Justice Involvement (IPS-AJI)** uses the evidence-based IPS model with adults who have recent involvement with the criminal justice system. IPS is typically implemented by IPS specialists (sometimes called employment specialists) in community mental health centers. They typically hold small caseloads of as many as 20 people so they can work intensively with each person. An important component of the IPS model is that mental health services and employment services are integrated, and employment specialists individualize services to the participant. This evaluation builds on previous research that found IPS to be effective for people with serious mental illness, the population for which it was originally design.
- **The Western Mass MOMS PartnershipSM (Western Mass MOMS)** strives to reduce depressive symptoms, improve social connections, and improve the economic well-being of caregivers with low incomes. Western Mass MOMS offers a course in stress management skills, opportunities for social connection with peers, and employment services. It serves caregivers with low incomes in Holyoke and Springfield, Massachusetts, who identify as women or nonbinary, are pregnant or have at least one child younger than 18, and are experiencing symptoms of depression. The program makes special efforts to recruit individuals receiving TANF.
- **The Philadelphia Workforce Inclusion Network (Philly WINs)** strives to match job seekers with disabilities to high-quality jobs. Services include intensive assistance to ensure a good job match, continued support once employed, and financial incentives for participation. In addition to working directly with participants, Philly WINs provides select employers with training and technical support on hiring, onboarding, and retaining employees with disabilities.
- **Work Success** is a structured, time-intensive employment coaching program in Utah. It provides group and individualized coaching, peer-to-peer support, job search assistance, and presentations and support from a licensed clinical therapist. Work Success serves individuals receiving TANF and other job seekers who are 18 or older, are seeking employment, and have access to resources (e.g., child care, transportation, work-appropriate clothing) that enable them to work.



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