Incorporating Behavioral Insights into Everyday Practices to Improve Program Operations

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Who We Are

MDRC’s Center for Applied Behavioral Science (CABS)

Using Behavioral Science to Make Programs Work for People

Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation

Studies ACF Programs and the Populations They Serve Through Rigorous Research and Evaluation Projects

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

- Applies behavioral principles to large-scale, human services programs
- Investigates problems using a method of Behavioral Diagnosis and Design
- Develops quick, sustainable, inexpensive changes focused on immediate outcomes

Today’s lessons are based on findings from the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Project and other research.
Today’s Goal

>> Highlight key principles from behavioral science that you can apply to improve elements of your programs <<

- Findings from the BIAS Project
- Behavioral Diagnosis & Design Process
- Principles of the SIMPLER Framework
- Resources
- Q&A
The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Project
BIAS Portfolio
3 domains, 7 states, 15 tests

WORK SUPPORT
- Improved engagement in appointments and activities
  - CA
  - NY

CHILD SUPPORT
- Improved payment rates
  - OH
- Increased requests for order modifications
  - TX
  - WA

CHILD CARE
- Improved subsidy renewal rates
  - OK
- Increased use of high quality-rated providers
  - IN
Overview of Findings

• 15 RCTs

• All sites saw a significant impact on at least one primary outcome of interest

• Effect sizes typically ranged from 2 to 4 percentage points, with some impacts that were larger
Overview of Findings

- 15 RCTs
- All sites saw a significant impact on at least one primary outcome of interest
- Effect sizes typically ranged from 2 to 4 percentage points with some outliers
- Intervention costs were typically less than $4 per program group member
While the impacts from behavioral interventions were typically modest, they were also:

- consistently achieved
- very low-cost
- scalable
Behavioral Diagnosis and Design
Define
What is the problem?

Diagnose
Why is it happening?

Design
How can it be addressed?

Test
What happened?

Source: adapted for the BIAS project from a framework developed by ideas42
Q&A
The SIMPLER Framework
Social Influence

Persuasion by society, peers, or a person of influence can affect people’s decisions and actions. People tend to follow what they think other people are doing.

You Could Lower Your Child Support Payments!

We will send you important information soon on how you could lower your child support payments if your income has gone down due to incarceration.

For example, a parent with a monthly order of $300 could reduce the amount of child support owed by $3,600 in just one year.

In a few weeks we will send you everything you need to complete and submit an application.

Other parents have had courts lower their child support by $200 to $500 per month.

Completing the application is easy. You can do it during a brief meeting with the law librarian.
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(Allcott, 2011)
Implementation Prompts

Encouraging people to plan the steps they will take to complete a task can move people from intention to action.
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POLL QUESTION

Can deadlines be effective if there is no penalty or consequence for missing the deadline?

A) Yes
B) No

Make Deadlines

Framing a future action as important and urgent by setting a due date discourages the tendency to prioritize today’s needs over tomorrow’s needs.
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Personalization

Efforts to personalize information or give customers personal assistance through a difficult task can improve outcomes.
8 new Picker Packer jobs are now available at Pro FS. Come to Bedford job centre on Monday 10 June between 10am and 4pm and ask for Sarah to find out more.

Hi Elspeth, 8 new Picker Packer jobs are now available at Pro FS. Come to Bedford job centre on Monday 10 June between 10am and 4pm and ask for Sarah to find out more.

Hi Elspeth, 8 new Picker Packer jobs are now available at Pro FS. Come to Bedford job centre on Monday 10 June between 10am and 4pm and ask for Sarah to find out more. I've booked you a place. Good luck. Michael

(The Behavioral Insights Team)
POLL QUESTION

Which of the following would be more likely to motivate you to bring a reusable bag when grocery shopping?

A) You will get charged 5 cents for a plastic bag.
B) You will get a 5-cent credit if you bring your own bag.

Loss Aversion

Humans tend to prefer avoiding losses to achieving equal-sized gains, relative to a reference point. Framing the same policy or opportunity as a loss can drive behavior more strongly than framing it as a gain.
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John:

By not attending your appointment, you may:

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

John:

By attending your appointment, you may:

- Take advantage of jobs available now or training and education for your career.
- KEEP up to $2,508 a year in cash benefits.
“Gain” Condition
- End of year bonus linked to student performance

“Loss” Condition
- Lump sum payment at beginning of year
- Must return some or all if students did not meet performance targets

Same performance = same bonus
Ease

Reduce complexity through, for example, defaults, simplification, removing hassles, and color-coding.
POLL QUESTION

You are trying to refer a customer to a form on your website. Do you:

A) Give the customer the URL to your website’s homepage and provide instructions on how to navigate to the form (for example, www.mdrc.org)

B) Give them a longer URL that takes them directly to the form (for example, www.mdrc.org/forms/TA.pdf)

Ease

Reduce complexity through, for example, defaults, simplification, removing hassles, and color-coding.
% Response rate directing people to webpage vs form

Link to a webpage containing the form: 19.2%
Link directly to the form: 23.4%

(The Behavioral Insights Team)

Ease
Reduce complexity through, for example, defaults, simplification, removing hassles, and color-coding.
POLL QUESTION

How often does your agency send customers reminders when they have an important appointment or deadline?

A) Consistently
B) Sometimes
C) Never

Reminders reduce mental effort by providing a cue that the task still needs to be completed.
Reminders: lead to stronger results

Reminders reduce mental effort by providing a cue that the task still needs to be completed.
POLL QUESTION

If your answer to the previous poll question was ‘Sometimes’ or ‘Never’: Why doesn’t your agency send reminders consistently?

A) We cannot afford the cost of sending more reminders.
B) We do not think sending (more) reminders will improve response.
C) We do not have the technological capacity.
D) We do not have enough staff to create and send them.
E) Other
F) N/A

Reminders

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Social Influence
Implementation Prompts
Make Deadlines
Personalization
Loss Aversion
Ease
Reminders
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Resources
Resources

Websites: www.mdrc.org/cabs | www.acf.hhs.gov/opre

- Behavioral Buzz Newsletter
- Site-specific BIAS reports
- BIAS Capstone Final Report (coming soon)
- Websites: www.mdrc.org/cabs | www.acf.hhs.gov/opre
- Twitter: @CABS_MDRC | @OPRE_ACF | #povertynudge
- Contact us at: BE.info@mdrc.org
What’s next for the BIAS team?

- BIAS Next Generation:
  - In-depth behavioral diagnosis of your program
  - Development of customized behavioral interventions with professional design
  - Capacity-building technical assistance and support, including engagement in a community of practice
  - Contact us at: BE.info@mdrc.org

Want to Be Part of BIAS?