Stimulus Learning Series: Benefits & Economic Mobility

*Using the American Rescue Plan to Transform Benefits Delivery*

July 9, 2021
Transforming benefits delivery to better serve the most vulnerable

**Vulnerable families are being left behind**

Families are shut out from structures that support economic mobility – especially families of color

Overrepresentation of poor families and families of color in punitive, harmful, and stigmatizing experiences

**Government safety net does not support economic advancement out of poverty**

What benefit programs were you frequently telling us about?

* **Nutrition:** SNAP, WIC
* **Housing:** Vouchers, LIHEAP
* **Child care:** Licensing, Subsidies
* **Cash assistance:** TANF, EITC

What you’ve told us…

**Barriers to access**

- Systems are difficult to access & navigate, esp. for marginalized communities
- Families have multifaceted needs, but siloed programs address each separately

**Ineffective supports**

- Supports for self-sufficiency sharply drop off as earnings increase
- In-kind benefits may not match up with what empowers a family to exit poverty

**Inefficient systems**

- Distortive administrative burden – obsolete technology, federal reqs.
- Outdated skills among public sector staff
You have told us you want to make the benefits system…

1. **Customer service improvements:**
   “Instead of our staff being behind glass, we need them to be in schools”

2. **Automatic eligibility determinations and enrollment across programs:**
   “You should not need to walk in one door for WIC and another for SNAP”

3. **Care navigation, integrated services, two-gen. case mgmt:**
   “Addiction treatment needs to serve mom as an individual and a parent”

4. **Developing more responsive resources:**
   “We want communities to co-design supports that reflect local needs”

5. **Testing changes to reduce “benefit cliff”:**
   “A pay raise at work should not make you worse off”

6. **Offering more flexible benefits, cash assistance, basic income:**
   “Low-income families know best what they need to rise out of poverty”

7. **Data-systems integration:**
   “No client should ever have us ask the same question twice”

8. **Technology modernization and automation:**
   “There’s only one person left who knows how to write computer code for our system”

9. **Upskilling public agency staff:**
   “Our workers have become ‘data-entry specialists’ rather than ‘get out of poverty specialists’”

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**Investments you are planning with ARPA funds**

1. **More accessible and more dignified**
2. **More effective at moving families out of poverty**
3. **More efficient**
Looking ahead: GPL’s stimulus learning series

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Please respond to our survey – it will inform upcoming learning sessions and future GPL technical assistance offerings.

Questions? Contact Danielle at danielle_cerny@hks.harvard.edu

Register for upcoming sessions at: https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/stimulus-learning-series