Behavioral Interventions for Labor-Related Programs:
Project Overview and Early Lessons Learned

Presentation at the APPAM Spring Conference Washington, DC

April 11 2015

Irma Perez-Johnson

Project Overview

Project Goals

DOL Chief Evaluation Office, Mathematica, and ideas42 are working with DOL agencies at the federal, state, or local levels to:

1. Identify important problems for which behavioral solutions may be a good fit

2. Design low-cost, "behavioral" program modifications that may help address these problems

3. Design rigorous evaluations to assess their impacts

4. Rapidly test these behavioral solutions

5. Share results and recommend next steps

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

ideas 42

DOL covers programs with varied goals
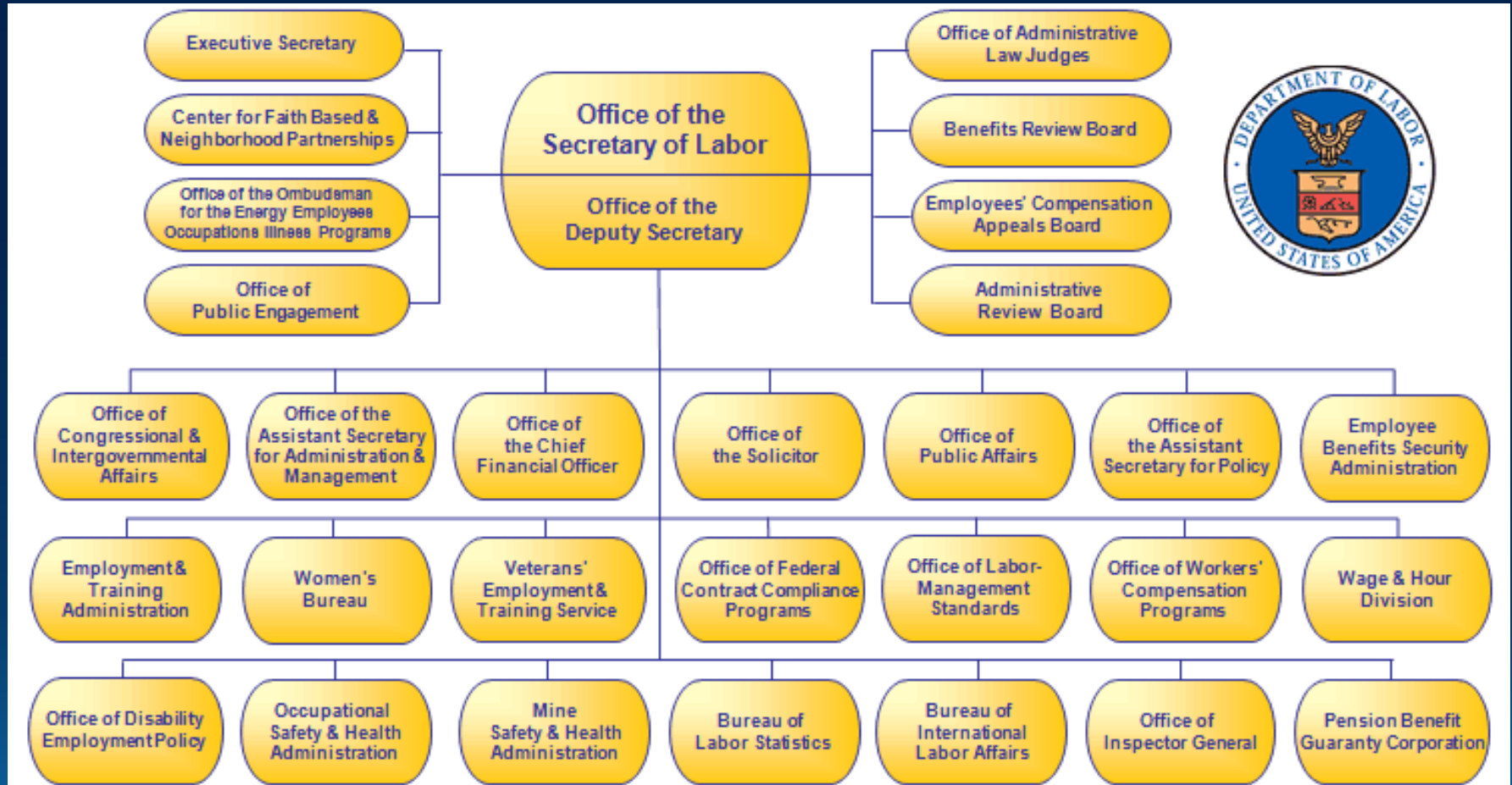
First Year Activities

- **Broad outreach, knowledge-building efforts within DOL**

- **Closely investigated potential opportunities within 4 federal agencies and 3 state / local jurisdictions**
  - **1 trial in the field currently**
  - **1 trial close to launch**
  - **1 promising trial in development**

- **Additional prospects have been identified**

- **Further knowledge-building and outreach activities planned**

How we have applied behavioral insights...

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

Sample Project, Part 1

- **Partnering with multi-county local workforce agency**

- **Focal program seeks to engage unemployed job-seekers in reemployment services**
  - **Participants called-in for a mandatory 1-on-1 meeting that must take place within 21 days**
  - **If still unemployed, may participate in up to 2 more 1-on-1 sessions**
  - **May be referred to additional services or resources**
  - **Supports available upon request after 3rd appointment**

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

ideas42

Sample Project, Part 2

- **Behavioral modifications being tested include:**
  1. **<u>Personalized</u> exhortation to promptly respond to call-in notice, stressing the <u>benefits</u> of participation**
  2. **<u>Follow-up</u> communication if fail to respond, stressing possible <u>negative consequences</u> (may lose UI benefits)**
  3. **Timely <u>reminders</u> of upcoming appointments**
  4. **<u>Persistence</u>-oriented communications after completing program, stressing the continuing availability of support and encouraging to reach out if need help**

- **Behavioral trial developed in ~3 months; will run for ~6 months to enroll sample of 500+ participants**

- **Will examine impacts on program uptake, reemployment service receipt, unemployment duration, reemployment rate, and other key outcomes**

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

ideas42

Lessons Learned

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

Behavioral insights are highly applicable to many Labor programs

- **Limited attention**

  → Business-owners may intend to respond to important DOL communications, but struggle to identify their optimal response, put off responding, and never get back to it.

- **Limited self-control**

  → Unemployed job seekers may intend to persistently look for jobs, but other obligations or discouragement may delay or limit their job search.

- **Limited cognition**

  → Workers may intend to contribute to 401K savings plans, but become overwhelmed by the number of investment options available to choose from.

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

ideas42

Various program elements present opportunities to apply behavioral insights

1. **General program information**

2. **Outreach and other program communications**

3. **Program paperwork**

4. **Enrollment, engagement procedures**

5. **Required responses**

6. **Required choices**

7. **Continued participation procedures**

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

Other Early Lessons

- **There is receptivity to learning about, and value to increasing awareness of, behavioral insights applicable to Labor programs**

- **Opportunities to apply these insights are plentiful but may go undetected without proactive outreach**

- **Important to safeguard time for intentional behavioral diagnosis**

- **Rapid trial design and implementation is feasible with willing, committed partners**

- **Not all opportunities meet the necessary conditions for behavioral trials**

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

ideas 42

Criteria for Selection of Behavioral Trials

1. **High priority, policy-relevant problems**

2. **Behavioral elements of the problem(s)**

3. **Scale of the problem(s)**

4. **Program elements that can be adjusted**

5. **Existing performance metrics and administrative data**

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

For More Information

- **Irma Perez-Johnson, Project Director**
  - **IPerez-Johnson@mathematica-mpr.com**

- **Celeste Richie, Project Officer**
  - **Richie.Celeste.J@dol.gov**

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

ideas 42