Colorado Evaluation & Action Lab
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

5 YEARS

Colorado Lab Newsletter
July 2023

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Contract Opportunity: Strategic Communications

The Colorado Lab seeks to contract with one or more communications specialists to support projects in identifying evidence-based strategies for communication, developing communication plans and messages that will resonate with defined audiences, and developing communication products (e.g., press releases, compelling data visualizations, social media messages). Experience designing and implementing strategic communications about evidence-building and evidence findings is required. We seek individuals interested in serving as the communications specialist for the "life" of projects and who are willing and able to dedicate time that mirrors the ebb and flow of tasks and deliverables.

Please learn more **here** and submit requested information to admin@coloradolab.org by July 28, 2023.

Job Opportunity: Senior Researcher/Project Director

The Colorado Lab is hiring a Senior Researcher/Project Director. This position will provide project leadership as well as hands-on research and evaluation, communications and dissemination support for the Lab's growing portfolio of projects.

PhD in public policy, public health, anthropology, sociology, economics, criminal justice, law, or a related field and six years of experience leading research projects required. Candidates must apply online through **jobs.du.edu** to be considered. Only applications submitted online will be accepted.

For best consideration, please submit your application materials by **4:00 p.m. (MST) July 14, 2023**. **Learn more and apply here.**

New Project: Food Security and College Completion

More than one-third of college students report food insecurity, and evidence increasingly suggests this may be a barrier to degree and certificate completion. The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) offers a way to deliver nutritional assistance to students, yet fewer than half of eligible students participate.

The Colorado Lab and **LINC** are supporting a nearly **$1 million study** to inform Colorado state agencies and postsecondary institutions on ways to expand student participation in SNAP. The three-year study began July 1, 2023 and focuses on students enrolled in Colorado public postsecondary institutions between 2014-15 and 2022-23 who completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, an important indicator of SNAP eligibility. Institutions will be asked to participate in a survey on their SNAP/basic needs practices in the upcoming year.

Interim reporting shared with state agencies and postsecondary institutions throughout the intensive three-year study will provide evidence on:
- Current SNAP participation.
- The relationship between SNAP participation and academic outcomes.
- The implications of different approaches to expanding participation.
- The ways in which postsecondary institutions are working to increase SNAP participation, and which practices are associated with high rates of SNAP take-up among eligible students.

This study is being conducted in partnership with the Colorado Department of Higher Education, Colorado Department of Human Services, and RAND Corporation, with support from the Institute of Education Sciences. For more information, please contact **Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein**.

Stakeholders Inform Use of Research Evidence in Perinatal Policymaking

The Colorado Lab recently convened policy decision-makers and influencers to co-develop strategies that Colorado can adopt to support evidence-based decision-making and drive equitable outcomes in perinatal health for all families. The convening was the culminating event on a project exploring how to improve the use of research evidence in perinatal policymaking. Investing in families in the perinatal period, from pregnancy through the first year of life, is crucial to helping infants and their caregivers get a healthy start in life.

The project was legislatively authorized by SB21-194 (Maternal Health Providers), a part of the Birth Equity Bill package to study the use of research evidence in policies related to the perinatal period. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment partnered with the Colorado Lab to fulfill this legislative opportunity.

Following initial "numbers and narratives" data gathering by the Colorado Lab, family, community, and policy leaders came together to address this task collaboratively. They were highly engaged and energized as they learned more about the development of a commonly accepted vision for Colorado's approach to **evidence-based decision-making** (EBDM) and discussed how to:

- Provide research evidence in context (e.g., also consider implementation feasibility, community voice, cultural values, etc.) during policy and budget decisions;
- Make research evidence clear so that it is useful across the policymaking process, from vision to creation to implementation;
- Make EBDM understandable so that it is actively used to support and align perinatal policy actions and investments; and
- Provide easy access to sources of quality research evidence and close evidence gaps for communities that have been historically harmed by research practices.

> ❝Having a shared language for and understanding of 'use of research evidence' feels very important to making progress on many levels. Also, having such a diverse group assembled together is powerful. This is also really on the leading edge nationally and we are working to share the Birth Equity bills as a model other states can use, including this use of research evidence piece. ❞
> – Participant's feedback on convening

The Colorado lab is creating a guide informed by project findings and key strategies identified by stakeholders in the convening. Available this fall, the guidance will support policy, family, and community leaders in working toward systems-level solutions in perinatal health.

To learn more, please contact **Dr. Courtney Everson**.

Early Childhood Stimulus Evaluation Hub

Between 2021 and 2022, the Colorado Department of Early Childhood received over $700 million in stimulus funding to strengthen Colorado's early childhood sector. The Colorado Lab is coordinating the Early Childhood Evaluation Hub, contracting with multiple evaluation teams to conduct high-quality evaluations of more than a dozen prioritized stimulus-funded activities to ensure the goals of the activities are being met. We're highlighting these great partners over the next several newsletters.

Early Childhood Workforce: Recruitment, Retention and Quality
To create a supportive work environment that attracts and retains a well-qualified and diverse early childhood workforce, stimulus-funded activities include:

- **Substitute Pool Fund** – Supporting efforts to grow the number of substitute early childhood providers and make it easier and more affordable to access substitute providers. The intent is to improve work quality for early childhood providers, allowing them time to care for themselves and their families and to engage in professional development opportunities.
- **Family Child Care Home and Availability and Outreach of Child Care Navigator Programs** – Navigators familiar with the communities they serve will provide timely, reliable data on child care openings and connect both families and home providers to needed information and resources.
- **Staffed Family Child Care Home Network** – Using an evidence-based model, the national nonprofit **All Our Kin** will provide trainings to three pilot sites across Colorado with the goal of increasing business efficiencies and sustaining early childhood care providers. The pilot sites will, in turn, provide the training to a broader network of home providers.

Spotlight on External Research Partner: Marzano Research
The Colorado Lab selected Marzano Research to evaluate these stimulus-funded activities. The team is led by managing senior researcher Dr. Carrie Germeroth who has expertise in early childhood development and learning with underresourced populations.

Through interviews and surveys of the Early Childhood Councils, Navigators, and other intermediaries implementing these activities, as well as child care providers, and the analysis of administrative data, the team's evaluation efforts will seek to:
- Understand how the activities were designed and implemented, with a focus on support provided.
- Track performance metrics such as trends in program participation, substitute pool utilization, and types of support utilized.
- Unearth challenges, success factors, and lessons learned to guide future investments.

"The through-line across these diverse efforts is the recruitment and retention of a well-qualified, diverse early childhood workforce," Germeroth said. "This is incredibly important, especially following the pandemic which exacerbated already existing weaknesses in this workforce."

Carrie Germeroth

With a long-time career devoted to early childhood care and education, and as the mother of four young girls, Germeroth is particularly passionate about the equity lens this work brings. "I am privileged to be able to provide my children with high-quality early childhood care experiences, and I want all children to have access to this. I value being able to contribute to building a more robust workforce and quality early childhood care system."

To learn more about the Early Childhood Evaluation Hub, visit our website or contact Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf.

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