State Innovative IMPACT Collaborative
Innovative Models for Policy Acceleration & Collaborative Testing

OVERVIEW

MDRC and the Coleridge Initiative are excited to announce an opportunity for state agencies to conduct a rigorous evaluation of a program or policy modification using their administrative data. We are looking to collaborate with state agencies interested in testing variations in program services such as enhancing a program by adding a new component or enhancing existing services. Tests must be programmatically feasible within a short time frame and have readily available data for measuring outcomes.

Over two years, the **State IMPACT** (**I**nnovative **M**odels for **P**olicy **A**cceleration & **C**ollaborative **T**esting) **Collaborative** consists of training and technical assistance to four state agencies committed to using research and evaluation to advance economic mobility among individuals and families with low incomes. Proposed tests must target systems and policies in one of several different areas: workforce development, higher education, income support, housing, or justice programs. While there is a preference for experimental evaluations (those using random assignment), quasi-experimental evaluations may be considered. We expect most tests will compare different services as opposed to comparing some services with no services. See the Appendix.

The State IMPACT Collaborative aims to accelerate evidence-based learning and decision-making for state agencies by working alongside them and providing funding. This collaborative will build on three unique existing capacities: Coleridge's data integration and analysis platform, the [Administrative Data Research Facility (ADRF)](#), MDRC's proven learning by doing approach to increasing state agencies' data analytic capacity, and MDRC's 50 years of experience carrying out high-quality rigorous evaluations.

About MDRC: [MDRC](#), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 1974, conducts rigorous studies of programs and policies that affect people with low incomes, actively disseminates lessons to policymakers and practitioners, and works directly with programs and agencies to help improve their effectiveness.

About The Coleridge Initiative: [The Coleridge Initiative](#) is a nonprofit organization working with governments to ensure that data are more effectively used for public decision-making. Coleridge provides agencies with the opportunity to enhance their workforce data literacy and collaborate within and across states to develop new technologies through the secure access and sharing of confidential microdata. Coleridge's secure data hosting platform, the Administrative Data Research Facility (ADRF), is a FedRAMP-certified environment that enables government agencies to link their longitudinal data with other states and agencies.

THIS INITIATIVE

Inspired by the success of an earlier initiative, the [TANF Data Collaborative](#), the State IMPACT Collaborative will bring together data providers, state employees, MDRC researchers, and Coleridge data scientists to collaborate

on tests of the effectiveness of new strategies across areas, using linked sources of government data. The State IMPACT Collaborative is a new effort designed to achieve the following outcomes:

- **Evidence-Building in the field of economic opportunity and mobility**: Builds knowledge about the effectiveness of innovative strategies for promoting economic opportunity and mobility for individuals or families with low incomes.
- **Evidence-Based Decision-Making:** Promotes the development and implementation of practices and policies grounded in rigorous evidence, enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of state programs while learning from other state agencies.
- **Thought Leadership Opportunities:** Engages participants in making conference presentations and writing publications, positioning state agency teams at the forefront of policy innovation and research.
- **Enhanced Program Improvement Knowledge:** Builds state agencies' knowledge of advanced methodologies to evaluate and improve their own programs, fostering continuous improvement and effectiveness.
- **Success Story Dissemination:** Showcases the achievements and learnings from the collaborative, highlighting the tangible benefits and best practices derived from the experience, encouraging wider adoption of evidence-based policies and evaluation efforts.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

The project team is prepared to work with state agency teams across various levels of knowledge, skills, and competencies. Some state agency teams may have enough internal staff capacity to do much of the required data work independently. For these sites, MDRC and Coleridge's role will primarily be coaching and providing support throughout the evaluation project. Other state agency teams may need more hands-on support to complete the data analytics work. Regardless of the state agency's evaluation and data analytics capacity, there will be two tracks:

1) For state agencies that currently have data in the ADRF and are ready to engage in evaluation work immediately.
2) For state agencies interested in leveraging the ADRF for an applied earning experience by uploading their data into the platform for evaluations.

Selected state agencies on both tracks can expect the following:

- **Direct funding:** State agencies will receive a grant to support their participation in the State IMPACT Collaborative and the development and completion of economic mobility-focused evaluations. Such funding could be used to support staff time as state team members work on the evaluation project and attend activities. Funding should also be used to support travel to in-person project convenings or project-related conferences. Grants of up to **$75,000 per year** will be paid and tied to achieving project milestones.

- **Direct Access to National Experts:** State agencies will have access to national experts in data analytics, evaluation, and capacity building across identified areas.
    - o A designated coach will offer specialized technical support to facilitate tests that provide quick, actionable insights to inform policies and program practices and address relevant questions. State

agency teams will meet regularly with their coaches in video calls to discuss strategic and operational questions about how to conduct the evaluation. The coaches have extensive experience accessing and processing data and conducting evaluations. They will support their state agency teams in completing their projects throughout the duration of this opportunity. The coach can also leverage access to other State IMPACT Collaborative team members and experts to address questions or issues that may emerge during the project.

- o A technical bench will be available to work with each state agency team to help carry out the evaluation to ensure we can support each team's unique data analytics needs.

- **Capacity Building in Data Science and Evaluation**: State agencies will receive Applied Data Analytics (ADA) training in data science leveraging state-sponsored administrative data:
  - o The ADA is a hybrid boot camp-style data analytics and evaluation training starting in the summer of 2025. The ADA curriculum will emphasize inquiries using multiple datasets to analyze economic mobility and opportunity while combining data preparation, measurement, analysis, evaluation, and presentation fundamentals.
  - o Regular interactive instructional webinars will be offered. Topics will include evaluation basics and methods, project sustainability, and legal tips. These learning events will complement in-person, cross-state annual convenings centered on the state agency's projects.

- **Collaborative Innovation:** The collaborative offers a cooperative environment where state staff, leaders, data providers, and experts from MDRC and the Coleridge Initiative can jointly conduct innovative policy testing.
  - o Staff from state agency teams will regularly interact with each other to share experiences, challenges, and accomplishments, both in person at events and on regular calls.
  - o The project team will document and disseminate lessons learned during this project to other states to support learning beyond the selected state agencies.

EXPECTED COMMITMENT

The following section describes the range of activities in which the state agency team will be expected to engage. The activities are all designed to support the development and execution of a rigorous evaluation so that what is learned and done can become part of everyday agency practice in the future.

1. *Propose a State IMPACT Project*

Applicants are expected to propose a project that uses an experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of a new state strategy to promote economic opportunity and mobility for individuals or families with low incomes, using linked administrative data sources. The proposed strategies could be in the areas of workforce development, higher education, income support, housing, or justice programs.

In early 2025, the coaches will work with site teams to refine their projects. This will include refining the research question(s) and crafting the project scope. Coaches will also work with site teams to identify the

data sources and elements needed to answer their research questions. Coaches will support site teams through data sharing and use agreements along with the secure data ingestion process. We expect that evaluations will primarily use administrative data, including management information system (MIS) data, to measure services received and short-term outcome data (such as earnings or educational outcomes). The use of survey data is discouraged, and implementation analysis is not required for this initiative.

Each state agency can decide whether they want the project team to work directly with their data in the ADRF (which would require a revised data-sharing agreement). In 2026, state agency teams will conduct analyses in the ADRF, learn about methods, and develop preliminary insights and findings that can be disseminated to various audiences.

A critical goal of the State IMPACT Collaborative is for agencies to apply the skills and tools from the two-year experience to have a lasting impact on the selected agencies. With that goal in mind, the expectation is that the techniques and practices learned in the State IMPACT Collaborative will become part of agencies' routine work after the collaborative ends to continue to add value to agency work.

Characteristics of Suitable Interventions for Rapid Cycle Testing Checklist

- ✓ **Measurable Outcomes:** Clear, quantifiable outcomes that can be measured quickly and accurately.
- ✓ **Short Cycle Duration:** Program modifications can be implemented within a few weeks or months and evaluated within a year.
- ✓ **Feasibility of Implementation:** Practical to implement within the constraints of the program or organization (includes authority to make programmatic changes).
- ✓ **Data Availability:** Access to relevant data that can be collected and analyzed in real- (or near) time.
- ✓ **Low-Risk:** Minimal risk to participants, ensuring ethical testing and iterative changes.
- ✓ **Stakeholder Support:** Support from leaders, program staff, and participants.
- ✓ **Clear Hypotheses:** Based on a clear hypothesis specifying the expected outcome and how it will be achieved. (*Note: this element is expected by full proposal stage, not the LOI.*)

Below are some examples and more are in the Appendix. Many other tests are possible as long as they meet the criteria in the checklist above.

- Varying delivery methods for nutritional counseling to improve participant outcomes (data sources: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Electronic Benefits Trust data)
- Implementing coaching techniques in case management to improve program retention (data source: MIS program tracking data)
- Offering incentives, such as gift cards or stipends, for regular attendance at job training sessions (data sources: MIS and Unemployment Insurance earnings data)
- Executing an already developed text-based or Artificial Intelligence-based outreach campaign to increase take-up of the Earned Income Tax Credit (data sources: MIS and tax data)

1. Execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

After the state agencies are selected, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be established between each state agency team and MDRC. The MOUs will outline the roles, functions, and responsibilities of teams, the project team, and the payment schedule and terms.

2. Execute a Data Sharing Agreement (DSA)
After the state agencies are selected, a DSA will be established between each state agency team and the Coleridge Initiative.

3. Attend Kick-Off Meeting
The state agency team will attend a half-day meeting connected to the March 2025 Coleridge Initiative annual convening. The meeting will allow the state and project teams to get to know each other and attend workshops. Agency leaders, administrators, and other key agency staff supervisors are encouraged to participate in person. State agencies will use their grant to support the travel costs and participation in this event.

4. Participate in the State IMPACT Collaborative training and technical assistance events, including:

5.1. Applied Data Analytics Training
A tailored version of the Applied Data Analytics (ADA) training will be offered virtually over 22 weeks starting in Summer 2025, except for four in-person days in the Washington, DC area.

5.2. Coach: State Agency Check-Ins
There will be regularly scheduled check-in conversations between the state agency teams, the designated coach, and other project team members to encourage ongoing collaboration to complete the project in the ADRF.

5.3. Other specialized training and technical assistance activities
Regular learning events designed for the state agency members will be offered virtually.

5.4. 2026 Cross-State Convening
Like the kick-off meeting in March 2025, there will be an in-person convening in late 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE AGENCY TEAM STAFFING

Each state agency team is required to have a **Team Coordinator** and an **Administrative Leader.** As far as the size of the project team, at least 3-5 agency staff should plan to work on this project consistently throughout the two years. There will be opportunities for additional team members to join particular events.

The Team Coordinator will lead the team and oversee the daily work on the evaluation project and be the point of contact for the project team. The coordinator is not necessarily expected to do the programming and analysis work themselves; however, they are expected to understand enough about the analysis to supervise the team's work and offer guidance. Lastly, they are expected to attend the ADA training. Beyond the day-to-day, the Team Coordinator can work within the agency to sustain the increased capacity after this opportunity. The Team Coordinator should be available to spend roughly 30% of a Full-Time Equivalent on average on this project, with the understanding that this level of effort may vary depending on the phase of the project over the two years.

The Administrative Leader is from the lead state agency who has authority to make decisions and commitments related to the state agency's project.

Interdisciplinary Teams: Beyond these two roles, effective teams include staff with the knowledge, drive, and availability to move the work forward. The ADA training is designed to meet the needs of both staff who are in technical and nontechnical roles in state agencies. We encourage each state agency team to include a mix of technical and nontechnical staff (e.g., experience working with the proposed administrative data, program operations and policy). Team members may include staff across units or other agencies and/or from local university research partnerships.

APPLICATION PROCESS AND DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS

The MDRC and Coleridge team will select 3-4 state agencies for this opportunity. The application process includes completing a letter of interest using the template provided, 1-2 interviews, and submitting a full proposal.

Applying to join the State IMPACT Collaborative is a three-stage process:

1. Applicants must <u>submit</u> mandatory letters of interest by **August 7, 2024**.
2. Selected state agencies will be <u>invited</u> for 1-2 interviews in **September 2024**.
3. Those invited to <u>submit</u> full proposals must do so by **October 18, 2024**.

The required content for the letters of interest and full proposals is summarized below. Eligible applicants should submit materials to **StateImpactCollaborative@mdrc.org** by the deadlines outlined below.

The selection team will consider the following factors and qualifications to select 3-4 state agencies:

1) **Program or policy idea, variation to be tested.** Proposed intervention or program modification that you want to evaluate using your administrative data during the two-year project period.
2) **Project alignment with the goals of the State IMPACT Collaborative.** The proposed test is an experiment involving a well-defined intervention focused on the upward economic mobility of individuals and families with low incomes in at least one of the identified areas (workforce development, higher education, income support, housing, or justice programs).
3) **Need and rationale for the proposed project.** Describe why this project is promising to pursue now.
4) **Strength of research design.** The proposed methodological approach or research design is expected to compare a group that received an intervention to a group that will receive either a different version of the intervention or will receive business as usual.
5) **Likelihood results will be translated into policy or practice or contribute to the field.** How the evidence from your project will translate into practice or policy. How the results will improve outcomes promoting economic mobility and opportunity.
6) **Leadership support.** Describe how your agency leadership supports this proposed project and your involvement and how they will commit to sustaining what is learned during and after the collaborative.
7) **Access to the necessary data to complete the evaluation.** Describe the data you need for your analysis and whether you have access to all of it and permission to use it for analytic use. At a minimum, the data needed will include key outcomes of your evaluation, such as enrollment, dosage, or activity data along with employment and wage data or education data needed to address the research questions.

8) **Makeup and qualifications of project team.** Describe the roles of the staff proposed to be on the project team who will participate in training and TA activities and conduct the evaluation.

KEY DATES

Date	Event
July 8, 2024	RFP release
August 7, 2024	Applicants must submit mandatory letters of interest
September 2024	Selected state agencies will be invited for virtual interview(s)
Late September	Selected state agencies will be invited to submit proposals
October 18, 2024	Full proposals must be submitted
December 2024	State agencies are expected to be selected and announced
January 2025	The State IMPACT Collaborative activities begin
March 2025	Selected state agencies attend project kick-off at the Coleridge Initiative's annual convening

BUDGET GUIDANCE

Although a budget narrative will not be required for the letter of interest, if your agency is invited to submit a proposal, you will be asked to submit a budget. Each state agency will receive up to $75,000 for each year of the two-year initiative.

If you have questions, please contact the State Impact Collaborative project team at **StateImpactCollaborative@mdrc.org**.

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF RAPID CYCLE TESTS

Intervention	Research Design	Source
Testing different intake methods.	Random assignment comparing two intake methods to see which was more effective in encouraging enrollment and participation in a program. One approach focuses on workshop benefits, the other emphasizes and provides supportive services.	SIRF Report
Testing value added of AI or apps or other technological enhancements.	Testing an ESTABLISHED skill-matching algorithm to pair job seekers with job openings based on skills and experiences to improve job placement rates (compared to standard job development). Other similar tests could compare use of virtual reality technology compared to hands on training or testing a mobile app to connect people to career counseling resources or testing gamification of existing skill development modules. These would all be compared to standard practice.	None: Hypothetical Example.
Comparing different mentoring approaches	Random assignment comparing mentor-initiated versus father-initiated peer mentoring to see which method was more effective in encouraging engagement and retention among program participants.	SIRF Report
Does targeting with machine learning add value?	Testing predictive analytics to guide real-time decision-making and improve service delivery. This includes anticipating participant responses to interventions and adjusting services accordingly.	Brookings (The Hamilton Project)
Testing alternate Communication Strategies	Evaluating different communication strategies (e.g., rewording letters, frequency of contact) to increase compliance and engagement in child support programs.	Gov Innovator (Gov Innovator Podcast)
Testing behavioral Nudges	Increasing on-time childcare subsidy renewals and usage of high-quality childcare or child support payments or engagement in services by testing the impact of simplified renewal processes and reminders.	BIAS Report (MDRC)
Testing value added of peer support groups or mentoring	Establishing peer support groups (or a mentoring program) for job seekers to increase motivation and reduce job search burnout (compared to self-guided)	None: Hypothetical Example.
Testing flexible schedules	Offering services with flexible scheduling options (evenings, weekends) to increase participation among those with daytime commitments.	None: Hypothetical Example.
Employer Engagement Workshops	Hosting workshops to improve employer engagement in workforce development programs to increase employer participation and job placements (compared to standard	None: Hypothetical Example.

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job development.

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