

### III. Discussion and Implications for Future Research

However, the results of this study should not be viewed as an end in themselves, but rather as the first outcome of a process through which the effectiveness of re-engineering efforts are examined over time. The very notion of re-engineering a program the size of the FSP carries with it issues related to the time needed to fully implement changes and the additional time needed to assess the results of these changes.

With the flexibility created by the passage of PRWORA, States have begun the process of restructuring how they deliver services, including changing the role of the caseworkers, increasing program accessibility, tracking client participation, and evaluating program components. While many States have implemented changes in these areas, it will require additional time for them to fine-tune these changes to improve their program operations.

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize some of the key findings of this report and to provide Economic Research Service with suggestions for future research. It is important to note that while this was a point-in-time study, the survey collected information on both changes implemented and activities the States planned to undertake as a result of PRWORA. The survey also was designed to capture information about a wide variety of re-engineering efforts that States made to the administration of their FSPs and about the States' goals for these changes. It is not, however, designed to assess how effective these changes have been. The consequences are unknown, and States will need time to assess how well they were able to meet their goals in re-engineering their FSPs.

#### Discussion of Key Findings

The number of re-engineering activities that took place as a result of the passage of PRWORA is impressive. While some States began re-engineering their FSPs prior to the passage of the bill, there is no doubt that Federal welfare reform led States to restructure administrative activities related to their FSPs. When the findings of this study are examined together, some interesting aspects of State re-engineering efforts can be noted. A summary of these key findings follows.

- While States have focused on implementing mandatory provisions of PRWORA, a significant amount of

effort has been focused on improving access to the FSP. It would be expected that States would make major efforts to restructure their administrative activities in order to implement mandatory provisions of PRWORA. The findings of this study confirm this, as 40 of the 50 States (80 percent) reported completing re-engineering activities in the category of changes to their client tracking systems. However, it is interesting to note that 39 of the 50 States (78 percent) implemented changes to improve program accessibility. In addition, 28 States planned to implement changes to improve accessibility in FY 2000. This finding clearly shows that States are attempting to address concerns related to the decline in FSP case-loads over the past several years.

- The number of States that implemented and planned activities that fall into multiple re-engineering categories was higher than expected. Because State FSP agencies are likely to have limited resources, one would assume that undertaking a large number of activities across multiple re-engineering categories would be uncommon. However, 35 States (70 percent) implemented activities falling into three or more re-engineering categories.
- It would appear that changing organizational structures to implement activities related to PRWORA is not a high priority with States. With the opportunity to conform FSPs with their TANF programs, one might have expected a large number of States to combine or consolidate program functions by changing their organizational structures. However, while 34 States (68 percent) took steps to conform TANF and FSP rules, only 11 States reported changing their organizational structures, and of those, only 3 cited conforming TANF and FSP as the goal of the changes. In addition, only one State reported that it planned to make changes in its organizational structure in FY 2000, and that State was going to discontinue its SFSP.
- There appears to be growing interest on the part of States to increase program monitoring and evaluation activities within their FSPs. Twenty-four States had implemented some form of increased monitoring and evaluation, while 15 States planned to do so in FY 2000. While tracking client participation rates was the primary focus of this monitoring, a number of States also recognized the importance of tracking

and evaluating client satisfaction and efforts to improve program accessibility.

- The level of re-engineering activity demonstrated by county-administered States was also noteworthy. As mentioned in chapter I, less re-engineering activity was expected from county-administered States because it was assumed that many of the re-engineering efforts would take place at the county level. However, 87 percent of the county-administered States undertook changes that fell into three or more re-engineering categories, as compared to 67 percent of the State-administered States. In addition, the finding that 92 percent of the county-administered States undertook changes to improve program accessibility was not expected.

## Implications for Future Research

While the findings of this study provide a strong baseline for examining State re-engineering efforts, they must also be viewed in terms of opportunities for future research. Simply knowing that these activities took place, while important, should not be viewed as an end in itself. Over the course of collecting and analyzing data for this study, a number of factors came to the attention of the study team that have implications for further research. These factors are discussed in detail below.

### Evaluating County Efforts To Re-engineer FSPs

More research may be warranted in States that pass down the responsibility of administering their FSPs to county governmental agencies. With the flexibility afforded by PRWORA, along with the decisions by States to decentralize FSP operations, counties may have had the same opportunity to adjust how they administer their FSPs as many States have. However, because of this local flexibility in how county programs are administered, State officials were unable to provide information about the types of change taking place within their counties.

Examining the extent to which counties re-engineered their FSPs was beyond the scope of this study. In order to have a complete picture of how the FSP has been re-engineered, a survey of county-run programs would be useful. It must be considered that some county-run programs may have caseloads as large as some State programs (such as Los Angeles County, California) or have some of the same issues related to urban and

rural divisions (for example, Riverside County, California) that the States have. A complete picture of the extent to which county-administered programs have re-engineered their FSPs within the categories identified for this study would add significantly to the overall picture of State re-engineering efforts.

### Evaluating the Extent to Which Planned Re-engineering Efforts Were Fully Implemented

This study gathered information about the re-engineering efforts implemented prior to FY 2000 along with the activities being planned for FY 2000. In the introduction, it was noted that while planned activities could be described, there was no way of knowing whether they were actually implemented. A followup study would provide a more complete picture of State re-engineering efforts. In particular, States planned a number of initiatives for increasing program accessibility. Because of concerns about decreases in the FSP caseload, it would be interesting to know if the plans for increasing client accessibility were actually implemented.

### Evaluating Components of State Re-engineering Efforts

Another area that deserves consideration is the evaluation of some of the specific re-engineering changes made by States as a result of PRWORA. As mentioned earlier, the amount of time to fully implement a re-engineering change will vary, but the change will not often produce measurable results until years later. The changes described in chapter II were each designed to improve some components of the FSP. They should be evaluated individually in terms of whether the proposed change met the goals of the State, whether the re-engineering change was modified as a result of problems identified during implementation, and whether the State plans to continue the change over the next several years.

Specific research questions could be developed for each of the re-engineering categories, including specific measures for evaluating the process and outcomes of the changes. A number of areas raise questions and stand out as deserving further evaluation, as follows:

- How has the changing role of the caseworker affected the interaction between caseworkers and clients? One of the key results of this study is the description of the changes States have made to the role of the caseworker. But as noted in chapter II, the formal

changes in the role of the caseworker may not fully describe how the interaction has changed between caseworkers and clients.

Because interviews and surveys with caseworkers and clients were not within the scope of this study, there was little information available about how the changing role of the caseworker may affect delivery of services. However, the ways that caseworkers now interact with clients, particularly how they manage client cases, the extent to which they provide services to clients in order to support self-sufficiency efforts, and the attitudes of the caseworkers and clients with regard to the changed role, deserve further examination.

- Have efforts to improve client accessibility been effective? Because of the concern over falling case-loads in the FSP, it would seem important to evaluate the numerous efforts being made by States to improve client accessibility. Of particular interest would be an examination of how well efforts to improve accessibility through expanding office hours, improving transportation services, and adding child care have been coordinated with outreach efforts to bring in new clients. In addition, the methods used by States to conduct outreach efforts to potential clients should also be examined. By evaluating the critical components of re-engineering efforts in the area of accessibility, valuable information could be provided to States who are in the beginning phases of developing increased accessibility efforts.
- Have States' efforts to improve client tracking systems resulted in increased program integrity? Chapter II discussed how a number of States have increased their efforts in tracking clients to meet the new requirements of PRWORA. These efforts have included increased use of computer technology to track client groups (such as ABAWDs) and of matching FSP administrative files against those of other social service programs and new-employment databases. Because these efforts are often complex and costly, it would make sense to determine which ones seem to be the most cost-effective in reducing program errors.
- To what extent have efforts to conform FSP and TANF rules simplified or complicated the adminis-

tration of the FSP at the State and local levels? In chapter II, it was noted that the programmatic and eligibility links between the TANF program and the FSP might be conducive to better coordination between the two programs. However, the practical implementation of efforts to conform program requirements may be too difficult for States to implement. The extent to which States have successfully integrated components of the two programs, and the extent to which problems or issues have discouraged this practice, would also seem to deserve future research.

### **Tracking State Efforts To Evaluate Re-engineering Changes**

As described in chapters I and II, States have begun conducting their own evaluations of FSP components. Developing a mechanism to collect and catalog State evaluation efforts would enable tracking of the extent to which individual States have evaluated their re-engineering efforts.

In addition to State-sponsored evaluations of FSP components, there may be other evaluation efforts at the State level that it would be important to include in such a catalog. A number of State governments have audit agencies in their executive or legislative branches, and these agencies evaluate the effectiveness of such areas as governmental reorganization, local service delivery systems, and State data collection systems. While these evaluations may not be specific to the FSP, they may encompass the entire department or division in which the FSP is located. Because changes in these administrative areas comprise a significant part of States' re-engineering efforts for their FSPs, they may be of value in assessing the effectiveness of administrative changes brought about by State re-engineering efforts.

Future research might also focus on creating a mechanism by which evaluation reports commissioned by State food stamp or welfare agencies, as well as by other evaluation or audit agencies, could be collected on a periodic basis and made available to researchers and FSP program administrators. This would provide a secondary source of data on how well individual State re-engineering efforts have worked.

## **Ongoing Tracking Systems To Describe Changes in State Re-engineering Efforts**

Re-engineering State FSPs is a continuing process, with States conducting ongoing efforts to fine-tune existing re-engineering changes as well as to develop new initiatives. ERS may want to consider a method for promoting continuing research into the types of re-

engineering changes being made in State programs. The regional offices of FNS may be able to play a strong role, as they often are made aware of changes in how State FSPs are administered. Information concerning ongoing State efforts may be found through State FSP management evaluations or through changes in the State's Plan of Operations.