

Behavioral Buzz is a newsletter about incorporating behavioral science into government, brought to you by the Administration for Children and Families and MDRC. It includes lessons from three projects sponsored by ACF in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS), BIAS-Next Generation, and Behavioral Interventions for Child Support Services.

[View email in browser](#)



October 2024

Three Strategies to Improve Client Experiences with Social Service Programs

How can social service programs better serve clients? In this Behavioral Buzz, we share three strategies that can help program staff understand client needs better and improve client engagement.

We illustrate these strategies with examples from a [recently published report](#) that details the approach that Monroe County, NY, took to improve attendance at activities required by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

[Read the full report](#) from the **Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency-Next Generation (BIAS-NG)** project, including complete materials and evaluation results.

Strategy #1: Walk through your program from the client perspective.

To identify what aspects of the program to focus on, programs can use a mapping exercise to better understand where clients are facing challenges.

- Map the process from a client's first program interaction through each subsequent point of contact or requirement.
- Review all client-facing communications, forms, and activities.

- For a deeper understanding, interview or survey clients to learn more about their personal experiences.

The Monroe County approach: County staff put themselves in the shoes of people applying for and navigating the requirements to receive TANF cash assistance. By mapping the client experience and interviewing clients, the **BIAS-NG** team was able to identify parts of the process that could be making it harder to complete program requirements.


- Clients received a single letter providing information about required meetings, leaving little room for error in receiving and remembering appointment information.
- Letters were densely worded, with complex, legal language.
- Program communications focused more on compliance and consequences than on potential benefits.

Strategy #2: Simplify communications and add reminders.

Programs can redesign communications to help clients better navigate requirements and activities, which may be especially important for complex programs like TANF.

The Monroe County approach: To improve attendance, the **BIAS-NG** team redesigned two appointment letters, and the County began sending text-message reminders to clients.

- The new appointment letters used simpler and friendlier language to highlight key information and prompt clients to anticipate appointment needs, such as child care or transportation. ([View the original and redesigned letters.](#))

When?	
Your Employment Assessment is scheduled for:	
	Date: Tuesday, 11 July 2023 Time: 9:00AM Meeting length: Approximately two hours Location: 691 St. Paul Street Rochester, NY 14605
<i>Please arrive early to allow time for parking and security</i>	

Why?

- Individuals like you have benefited from attending this meeting
- Discuss your career interests plus options for job training and further education
- Explore additional assistance, like transportation or child care

Your attendance is important!

If you do not attend this meeting you may:

- Miss out on jobs available now or training and education to further your career
- Lose some or all of your cash or SNAP benefits



How?

1. Mark the date on your calendar.



Date: Tuesday, 11 July 2023
Time: 9:00AM
Location: 691 St. Paul Street, Rochester, NY 14605

☐ I will attend the meeting.

2. Plan for this appointment!

How will I get to this meeting?

- ☐ Drive
- ☐ Get a ride from _____
- ☐ Take the bus. *Unless you were previously issued one, use the bus pass included here for this appointment only.*

3. Come to our office.

- You can bring your child to this appointment. Childcare is not needed for this appointment but will be needed for later employment activities. Do you have ongoing child care?
☐ YES. Please complete the included form and bring to your appointment.
☐ NO. Please contact the Western New York Child Care Council at 1-800-743-5437 for assistance.
- You are expected to appear as scheduled. **You may lose benefits if you do not attend.** These actions are in accordance with NYS Social Service Law 385.6, 385.7, and 385.12.

- Text-message reminders encouraged clients to plan ahead and attend important meetings and activities.

Hello Mary. This is a message from DSS. Don't forget your Employment Assessment appointment on 10/7 at 9:00 am at RochesterWorks! 100 College Avenue, Suite 200, Rochester, NY

We'll review your job plans and training options. Remember, if you don't attend you may lose some of your benefits. Make a plan now to get here.

Questions? Call 585-753-2750. We cannot read any responses to this text.

Strategy #3: Approach staff interactions with clients as a chance for engagement.

Each meeting or activity presents an opportunity for programs to connect with clients and personalize important information. Staff can use these moments to interact more collaboratively, to understand any client questions or concerns in addition to explaining required steps and benefits.

The Monroe County approach: The **BIAS-NG** team, in partnership with Monroe staff, successfully redesigned an internship orientation meeting, improving attendance for the first week of an internship. As one County staff member explained, in the new orientation, “We’re not speaking at them, we’re speaking with them.”

- The more personalized orientation encouraged clients to share past experiences, identify challenges they faced, and brainstorm ways to participate in work activities.
- The group reviewed specific, common scenarios, such as issues finding child care or transportation and problems with coworkers or supervisors, and then shared tips, collectively planning how to succeed when faced with each challenge.

As measured by internship attendance, the new approach proved more effective than the original one-way presentation focused on general job support and the consequences of nonattendance.



Copyright © 2024 MDRC. All rights reserved.

[https://us5.forward-to-friend.com/forward?u=295769bc0cff000404328b697&id=6dd2e2748f&e=\[UNIQID\]](https://us5.forward-to-friend.com/forward?u=295769bc0cff000404328b697&id=6dd2e2748f&e=[UNIQID])

• [Update your preferences](#) • [Unsubscribe](#)