



**2008 Research Interests and Needs of the
Medicaid Infrastructure Grantee (MIG) States**

January 22, 2009

Anne E. Brown-Reither

Submitted to:

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
Disabled & Elderly Health Programs Group
7500 Security Blvd, Mail Stop S2-14-26
Baltimore, Maryland 21244-1850
Telephone: (410) 786-6126

Project Officer: Joseph Razes

Submitted by:

MIG Research Assistance to States and
Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.
600 Maryland Ave., SW, Suite 550
Washington, DC 20024-2512
Telephone: (202) 484-9220

MIG-RATS Directors: Anne Reither
Amy Porter

Project Director: Su Liu

CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	v
BACKGROUND	1
METHODS	3
FINDINGS	5
A. SELF-ASSESSED RESEARCH CAPACITY	5
B. SPECIFIC TYPES OF RESEARCH SUPPORT	7
C. ADDITIONAL TYPES OF RESEARCH SUPPORT	12
D. FACILITATION OF MULTI-STATE RESEARCH EFFORTS	14
E. FACILITATION OF ACCESS TO DATA	16
F. ACCESS TO RESEARCH INFORMATION	17
G. GUIDANCE ON RESEARCH PROCESSES	19
RECOMMENDATIONS	22
APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS	
APPENDIX B: OPEN-ENDED INVENTORY RESPONSES	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2006, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced the concept for a state-based research resource center to support activities under the Medicaid Infrastructure Grants (MIGs). The original vision called for establishing a resource center with voluntary participation that would be responsive to the states' research needs and available to all states. In large part, state researchers would determine the center's goals and priorities.

The research resource center, named the Medicaid Infrastructure Grants – Research Assistance to States (MIG-RATS) was launched in Fall 2006. Based on findings from a needs inventory and telephone interviews held with 29 of the 43 MIG states, four main activity areas:

1. *Facilitation of multi-state research efforts.*
2. *Facilitation of access to data not available through state sources.*
3. *Access to research information from other states and projects.*
4. *Guidance on research processes, strategies, and analyses.*

In 2008, CMS requested a re-assessment of MIG states' needs from MIG-RATS. An inventory was administered to MIG state researchers in August, 2008 that included sections to 1) re-assess states' internal research capacity and perceived usefulness of a variety of types of research support, and 2) solicit input on new directions for the four activity areas. Responses were received from 33 of 40 MIG states (83%). Findings from the inventory indicate that:

- ***Coordination of interests, coordination of activities, and assistance in accessing federal data*** remain the highest priority supports states want to receive from MIG-RATS.
- ***Internal research capacity among the MIG states has increased*** since the initial inventory, with only nine percent indicating internal research capacity at the 'freshman' level as opposed to twenty-three percent in 2006.
- ***States with lower research capacity continue to have significantly different needs for support***; notably access to direct technical assistance and assistance with research design.
- ***The overall findings of the re-assessment support continued focus on the four main activity areas*** although opportunities for expansion of specific activities were identified.

A full set of findings from the inventory coupled with observations from the first two years of MIG-RATS operations follows. Recommendations for next steps in each of the activity areas are also presented.

BACKGROUND

In April 2006, CMS announced the concept for a state-based resource center designed to support the research activities of MIG states. CMS's vision for the center, tagged the State-Based Research Resource Center (SBRC), was:

“...to organize states’ thoughts on data and develop a state-driven research agenda. [The SBRC] will conduct a needs assessment during the development of the agenda. [SBRC staff] will bring the results back to the Inter Agency Workgroup. CMS and SSA (the Social Security Administration), in the meantime, will be working on data sharing agreements to allow state access to the data.”¹

In addition to working to improve access to data, CMS wanted to develop a center that meets the research needs and interests of MIG states and provides equal access to research support regardless of the level of a state's research sophistication. CMS wanted a center that would support ongoing state research activities and state researchers, enabling the latter to make better use of additional data or information.

The SBRC, later dubbed the MIG-Research Assistance to States (MIG-RATS), represents an innovative collaboration among state researchers, Mathematica Policy Research (MPR), and CMS. Overall, the center provides a mechanism to enhance states' capacities to use quantitative information to shape programs and policies for promoting the employment of individuals with disabilities. CMS provides the financial support for the center and a federal perspective on policy issues. MPR has developed several databases related to employment of individuals with disabilities that can have direct application to research efforts in the states. And the center staff provides leadership and organization for states to identify their research needs, share ideas, and develop strategies for using available data to improve their programs.

¹ Personal communication with Carey Appold, CMS MIG Technical Director, April 2006.

The MIG-RATS's mission was to be responsive to states' needs, with the states determining the center's primary support activities and goals. The initial needs assessment conducted in August 2006 set out to determine the sufficiency of interest in a research resource center and, assuming a satisfactory level of interest, what was wanted from such a center. The initial assessment revealed sufficient interest in a research resource center, and MIG-RATS staff then developed an initial agenda for the center based on state input and began to direct the continuing operation of the center.

In August 2008, CMS requested that MIG-RATS staff conduct a follow-up needs assessment to identify changes in research priorities of the MIG states, and to obtain input from state staff that had not completed the initial needs assessment in 2006. Findings from the follow-up needs assessment, along with information obtained from MIG-RATS operations, are presented here.

METHODS

The MIG-RATS staff used a short online inventory to collect information from the state MIG staff. The inventory included a re-assessment of states' perceived research capacity and priority areas for the research center. In addition, it requested input on new directions for upcoming MIG-RATS activities. Findings from the inventory analysis are supplemented by observations from the MIG-RATS Directors.

The re-assessment section of the inventory asked states to provide input on several types of research support that were identified (1) as part of CMS's original vision for the center and (2) from states' initial reactions to the announcement of the center. States were invited to provide suggestions for additional supports not mentioned in the inventory. To help identify the needs of states with more and less sophisticated research capabilities and to examine changes in perceived capacity since 2006, states provided an assessment of their current research capacities.

The new direction section of the inventory obtained MIG state input on content and focus for expanding MIG-RATS planned activities. Items were included to identify preferred topics for new research workgroups, content for toolkits, enhancements to the MIG-RATS website, and project areas where states may be interested in conducting collaborative research. The inventory was also used to collect information for implementing three planned MIG-RATS initiatives: state recommendations on the development of individual-level outcomes, a repository of information on professional organizations relevant to MIG researchers, and volunteers to join the established Integrated Data Review (IDR) committee.

During August, invitations to complete the online inventory were sent via e-mail to the primary Researchers with the MIG Director copied in each of the 40 MIG states. Even though the inventory was designed for online completion, a copy was sent as a Word document

attachment so that respondents could solicit input from state researchers and formulate answers before completing the inventory (see Appendix A for copies of the inventory and cover memorandum).

The initial deadline for completing the inventory was set as August 27. However, early responses were slow to arrive, and feedback from the MIG states indicated that August was a particularly difficult month to obtain input from relevant parties and find time to complete the inventory in the midst of competing deadlines. As a result, the completion deadline was extended to September 10, 2008.

FINDINGS

Thirty-three states completed the needs inventory for a response rate of nearly 83 percent. Of these, nineteen (58%) had also completed the initial inventory in 2006, leaving 14 that were either new to the MIG since 2006 or had not completed the initial inventory for other reasons.²

Fifteen of the responses came from states with Comprehensive Employment Opportunities (CEO) grants, while the remaining eighteen were from states with basic MIG projects. In 2008, about 43% of states had CEO grants. The proportions of inventories completed from each type of grant provided a representative balance in responses between CEO and basic MIG grantees.³

PART I: RE-ASSESSMENT

A. SELF-ASSESSED RESEARCH CAPACITY

To assist MIG-RATS staff in identifying state research needs regardless of internal capacity, the inventory asked states to provide self-assessed ratings of their current capacity to conduct research and to access to data. The items used a familiar “freshman, sophomore, junior, senior” rating system with definitions of capacity at each of the four levels (see Appendix A.2 for exact wording of definitions).

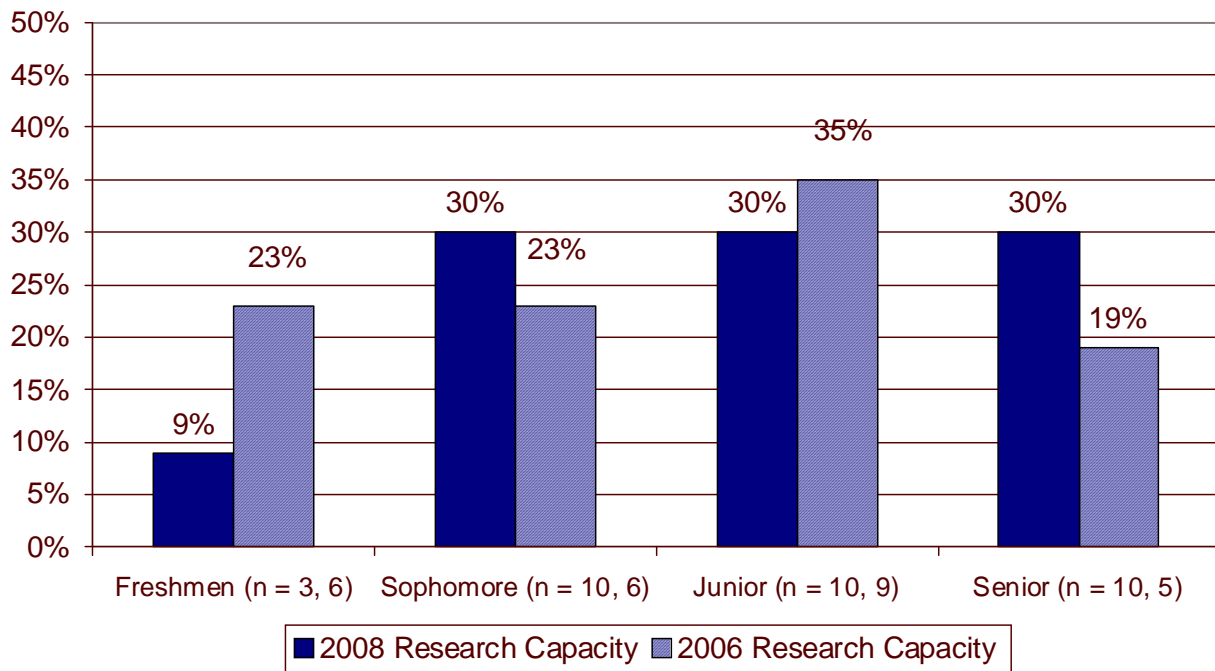
As seen in Figure 1, states indicate slightly higher levels of internal research capacity than in 2006, but the range still varies widely. Only 3 states (10%) reported having research capacity at

² The response rate for the initial inventory in 2006 was just over 60 percent, or 26 of 43 MIG states. Since the completion of the initial inventory, 2 states have added MIG projects, while 5 states have transitioned out of the MIG.

³ The 15 CEO states represented 45.4 percent of needs inventory respondents. In 2008, 42.5 percent of states were CEO grantees while the remaining 57.5 percent were basic MIG grantees. This shows a shift from 2006, when approximately one-third of states held CEO grants.

the ‘freshman’ level as compared to 6 states (23% of respondents) in 2006. This is primarily due to an increase in research capacity among states that had also completed the initial inventory. More than 40 percent of states (8 states) that had completed the initial inventory reported an increase in research capacity since 2006, while only 15 percent (3 states) reported a decrease. As a whole, states that had not completed the initial inventory tended to report more conservative levels of internal research capacity.⁴

FIGURE 1
STATE RESEARCH CAPACITIES



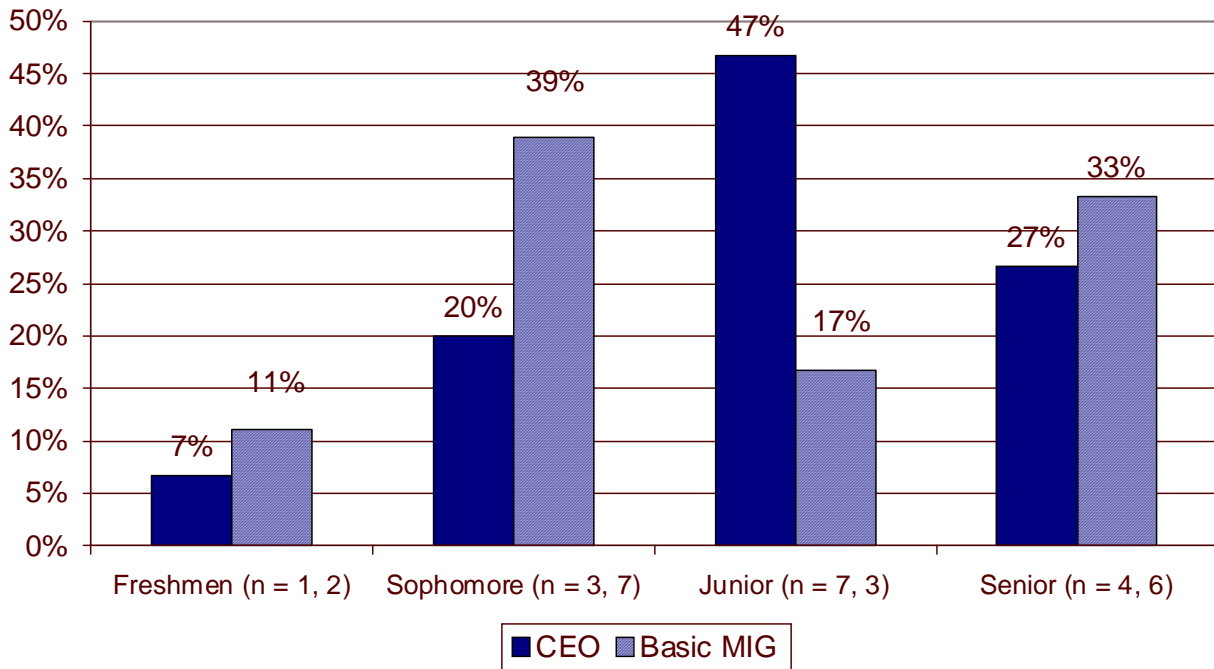
Not surprisingly, CEO states tended to rate themselves somewhat higher than basic MIG states on internal research capacity. As shown in Figure 2, most CEO states (74%) considered themselves to be juniors or seniors with regard to research capacity while half of basic MIG states (50%) viewed their internal research capacity at the junior or senior level. These numbers

⁴ For states that had completed the initial inventory, reported levels of research capacity are 5% freshman, 16% sophomore, 37% junior, and 42% senior. For states that had not previously reported, levels of research capacity are 14% freshman, 50% sophomore, 21% junior, and 14% senior.

reflect the overall increase in internal research capacity and show greater balance between the CEO and basic MIGs than in 2006. In 2006, most CEO states (80%) considered themselves to be juniors or seniors with regard to research capacity while most basic MIG states (63%) viewed their research capacity at a freshman or sophomore level.

FIGURE 2

STATE RESEARCH CAPACITY BY GRANT TYPE



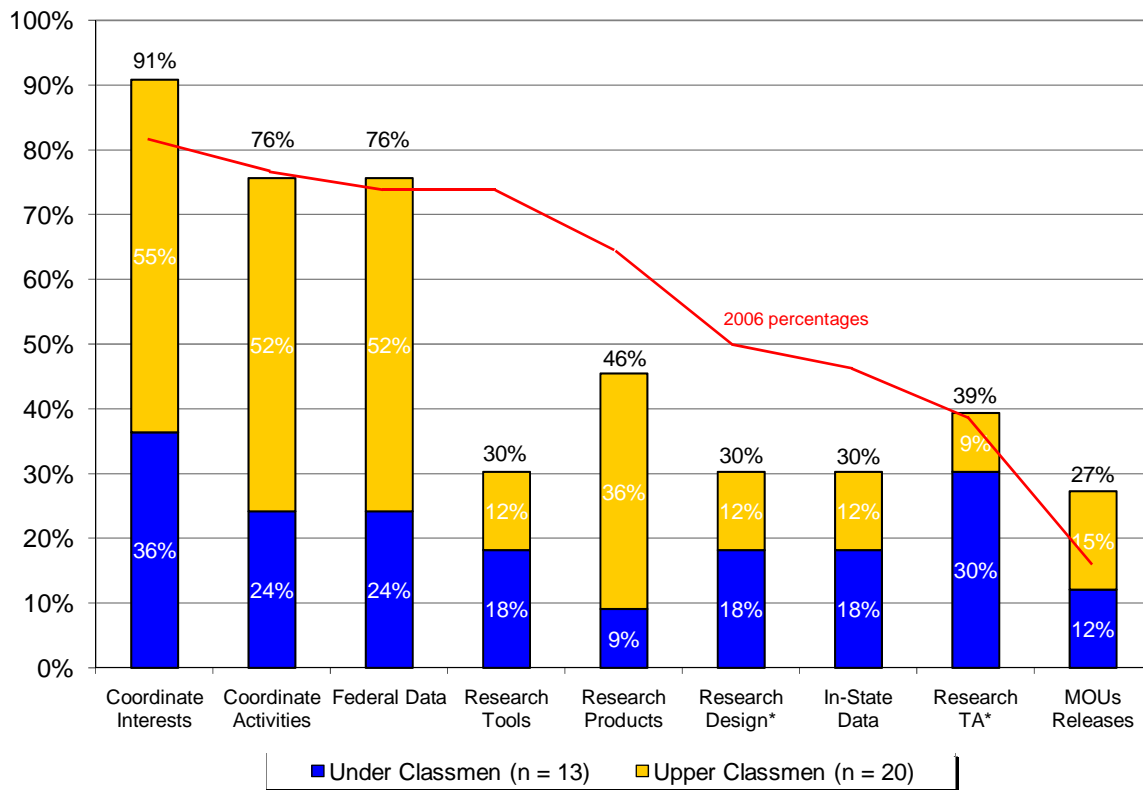
B. SPECIFIC TYPES OF RESEARCH SUPPORT

Following the self-assessment of research capacity, the inventory asked respondents to provide input on the perceived utility of a series of types of research support. The types of support provided a re-assessment from the 2006 inventory, and were based on CMS’s original vision for the research center and on the initial feedback from states in response to the announcement of the MIG-RATS. Responses were collected using a five point scale ranging from “Not Useful–Don’t Do This” to “Very Useful–Make It a Priority.”

Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents rating a type of research support as “useful” or “very useful.” Each category has been divided to distinguish respondents identifying themselves as under (freshmen, sophomores) or upper (juniors, seniors) classmen with regard to research capacity.⁵ The research supports are listed in order of priority based on the initial inventory from 2006, with the total percentages from the initial inventory presented as a reference line.⁶

FIGURE 3

USEFULNESS OF RESEARCH SUPPORTS BY RESEARCH CAPACITY



* Indicates a significant difference in response patterns between under and upper classmen, $p < .01$.

⁵ Distributions were also examined in relation to Type of Grantee (MIG or CEO). There were no significant variations in response patterns by grantee type; therefore, the individual distributions are not shown.

⁶ Exact values for the 2006 reference line are: coordinate interests 81%, coordinate activities 77%, federal data 73%, research tools 73%, research products 65%, research design 50%, in-state data 46%, research TA 38%, and MOUs/releases 15%.

As seen in Figure 3, the top three priorities for research support remain unchanged from the initial inventory. Ninety-one percent of respondents indicated that “coordination of research interests across states, such as helping connect states that are conducting research on similar topics” should be a priority. This is an increase of ten percent from the 2006 responses.

The second and third priority areas for support, “coordination of similar research activities across states, such as helping to standardize survey questions or data sources or replicate analyses” and “assistance in identifying potential sources of federal administrative data to meet project evaluation needs” remain essentially unchanged from the initial inventory. Each was found to be “useful” or “very useful” by seventy-six percent of respondents, numbers that correspond closely to 2006 responses.

The next block of research supports showed a drop-off in perceived utility by respondents, the most remarkable of which was “assistance in developing or identifying research tools, such as surveys or focus groups, for use in state projects”. This type of support had originally been identified at a priority level comparable to the two prior activities (73%), but decreased considerably, with only thirty percent of respondents indicating that they felt it was “useful” or “very useful”. “Facilitation of research product development, such as policy papers or articles for publication” also showed a decrease in utility, though less extreme.⁷

The remaining four suggested supports, which had been rated as “useful” or “very useful” by fifty percent or less of respondents in the initial inventory, remained lower on the priority list. However, as before these areas of research support are those where differences appear between under and upper classmen. Significantly more under classmen than upper classmen considered “assistance in developing research designs or plans to evaluate specific MIG projects” and

⁷ It is worth noting that facilitation of research product development approached a significant difference in response patterns, receiving higher priority from MIG states that considered themselves to be upper classmen with regard to research capacity ($p = .10$).

“technical assistance for selecting and performing statistical analyses” as useful priority areas ($p < .01$)⁸. It is also worth noting that “guidance in acquiring and protecting data, such as developing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or consent/release forms and human subjects considerations” showed somewhat greater utility to MIG states than it had in 2006, though it remained of lowest priority.

Shifts in the levels of usefulness reported by respondents can primarily be attributed to changes in ratings among states that also completed the initial inventory in 2006. Ratings of utility among states that had not completed the inventory in 2006 were comparable, on average, to the responses to the initial inventory. The only notable exception was for “research tools” which was rated much lower by both groups.

There are a variety of potential reasons for the shifts in the levels of utility indicated for the different types of research support. Perhaps most relevant is the generally higher level of internal research capacity reported by states, particularly those that had completed the initial inventory. On the whole, states with greater internal research capacity could be expected to effectively manage tasks such as designing research plans, developing research tools, accessing in-state data, and producing research products. Unchanged ratings for access to research technical assistance, which is available in response to specific requests as needed, would also indicate that states feel more prepared to address common research practices, but also like to maintain access to assistance under certain circumstances.

It is also possible that after two additional years, states have made progress in implementing research projects and have less of a need to design evaluations, develop research tools, and identify sources of in-state data. It is fully possible that some of these gains may be due in part

⁸ Although not significant, respondents from basic MIGs also indicated that research technical assistance was a higher priority than did respondents from CEOs ($p = .10$).

to prior MIG-RATS efforts.⁹ With MIG projects currently scheduled to end in 2011, states may not currently anticipate the need for implementing new research projects.

Finally, after two years of experience working with MIG-RATS, states may have a better idea of what they need or prefer to obtain from a third party. For example, although MIG-RATS convened a peer review panel to assist states with research product development, no MIG state has used it. Likewise, although states continue to express considerable interest in collaborative research projects, they want (and need) to maintain opportunities to customize data collection and project implementation strategies. States may simply have come to the realization that MIG-RATS is most valuable for assisting with issues that internal staff aren't positioned to address, but there is less utility in drawing on MIG-RATS resources when goals can be reasonably attained without external assistance.

Regardless of the reason, it appears that MIG states continue to find value in MIG-RATS and look to the research center primarily for coordination of research interest and activities, and assistance in accessing federal data. These three types of support were initially identified as the highest priorities, and the need has only intensified. In addition, although research capacity has increased for many states, it is important to continue to address the priorities of states with less internal capacity. Direct technical support remains critical, particularly to this group of MIG states.

Finally, it is important to note that the findings presented above only reflect a very high level of perceived utility. Lower priorities should not be interpreted as a lack of need for a type of research support. If "moderately useful" responses were also included, every type of support,

⁹ MIG-RATS have provided direct technical support in all of these areas. In addition, MIG-RATS offered a workshop on research design in Fall 2006, and house some surveys and research tools on the MIG-RATS website.

with the exception of assistance with MOUs/releases, would be considered useful by at least sixty percent of respondents.¹⁰

C. ADDITIONAL TYPES OF RESEARCH SUPPORT

In addition to asking respondents to rate identified types of research support, the inventory invited respondents to provide more information about their responses and/or indicate other types of support they would like to receive. Few respondents offered comments or suggestions. And of those that were offered, all fit within the general types of support already identified (see Appendix B.1 for responses). However, in some cases, the emphasis was somewhat different than past MIG-RATS activities:

- *Federal Data* – The respondent suggested that in addition to working toward making more individual level data available to states, MIG-RATS also provide more information to utilize and interpret specific data elements.
- *Research Products* – Two respondents indicated that they could use support in identifying strategies and opportunities for disseminating research products.¹¹
- *Technical Assistance* – The respondent expressed interest in assistance on targeted, high level analysis techniques, possibly supplied by MPR.¹²

¹⁰ When “moderately useful” responses are included, exact values are: coordinate interests 100%, coordinate activities 94%, federal data 91%, research tools 67%, research products 76%, research design 67%, in-state data 61%, research TA 76%, and MOUs/releases 43%.

¹¹ MIG-RATS currently have a Toolkit under development for networking with professional organizations and identifying potential opportunities for disseminating information.

¹² One of the initial objectives of MIG-RATS was to facilitate access to advanced technical support from MPR. Few states have taken advantage of this opportunity, suggesting that there may be a need to increase awareness of the possibility among MIG state research staff.

PART II: NEW DIRECTIONS

Following the initial research needs and interests assessment, MIG-RATS developed four activity areas designed to address the priorities identified through the 2006 inventory and supplemented with input obtained through interviews with MIG state staff. Those activity areas, which have formed the underlying agenda for MIG-RATS efforts, are:

1. ***Facilitation of multi-state research efforts.*** This area facilitates collaborative efforts and communication among state research programs. Activities include workgroups to coordinate research activities within states or to build multi-state research projects as well as contact lists to help researchers communicate with one another.
2. ***Facilitation of access to data not available through state sources.*** This area helps researchers have access to more information to support their research projects. Activities include expanding the aggregated information currently available to states from the integrated data set and developing a process by which states request analyses specific to their own research needs.
3. ***Access to research information from other states and projects.*** This area helps make state research efforts more efficient and reduces duplicated effort by providing easy access to available products and information. Activities include maintenance of a Web site to serve as a repository of information from MIG projects, MIG-RATS activities, and external research products.
4. ***Guidance on research processes, strategies, and analyses.*** This area addresses variation in state needs by offering targeted support. Activities include direct assistance with research activities or analytic techniques and workshops on research processes

Responses to the re-assessment portion of the follow-up inventory offer no reason to alter the four MIG-RATS activity areas. However, feedback from MIG states and experience from the first two years of MIG-RATS operations offer some insights for expanding the focus of the activity areas. In addition, the new directions section of the follow-up inventory was used to solicit input from MIG states on planned activities. The following sections present next steps and recommendations for each of the four MIG-RATS activity areas.

D. FACILITATION OF MULTI-STATE RESEARCH EFFORTS

The multi-state research efforts activity area was developed to address the MIG states' interest in coordinated research. Since coordination of interests and coordination of activities continue to be the highest priorities for MIG state staff, MIG-RATS should attempt to expand capacity to support multi-state activities.

The primary mechanism for coordinating research interests and activities has been topical research workgroups. An item in the new direction section of the inventory was designed to solicit input on topics for future workgroups. Table 1 shows the percentage of states indicating interest in each of the proposed topics.

TABLE 1
TOPICS FOR RESEARCH WORKGROUPS

Topic	Percent	Area of Interest	Percent
Youth in Transition	64%	Peer Supports	39%
Ticket to Work	55%	Employer Surveys	36%
Supported Employment	52%	Developmental Disabilities	27%
Mental Illness	49%	Employer Networks	21%

Each topic received interest from several states, with 'youth in transition' appealing to the largest number of respondents at sixty-four percent (21 states). This followed closely by 'Ticket to Work', 'supported employment', and 'research with specific target populations – mental illness'. Each of these topics received interest from around half of respondents or more, suggesting that MIG state staff continue to be interested in workgroup participation.

States were also invited to offer suggestions for additional workgroup topics. Fourteen states provided potential workgroup topics (see Appendix B.2 for responses). All offered one-of-a-kind suggestions, with the exception of four recommendations for a workgroup on Medicaid

Buy-In research, or different aspects thereof. States that considered themselves to be upper classmen with regard to research capacity were significantly more likely to suggest additional topics for research workgroups ($p < .01$).

States were also asked to indicate whether they would be interested in coordinating research projects with other MIG states, and what the focus of the planned research would be. Eighteen states expressed interest in engaging in coordinated research, with MIG states with higher internal research capacity again indicating significantly more interest ($p < .05$).

Topics varied widely, with some being either very broadly defined or quite specific (see Appendix B.3 for responses). Nonetheless, a few topics emerged as offering potential for coordination among states. Two states each suggested coordination of research on youth in transition, the state as a model employer, and the SSDI benefit offset.¹³ In addition, eight states indicated interest in coordinating efforts on different aspects of Medicaid Buy-In research. While the proposed topics do not overlap, there may be potential to identify states with interest in coordinating research on some aspect or subgroup within the Medicaid Buy-In population.

Although the MIG states continue to express high levels of interest in workgroups and coordinated research efforts, MIG-RATS have struggled at times to manage the groups effectively. Teleconference formats can be challenging environments for encouraging participation, and though well-intentioned, state staff are sometimes pulled to priorities within the state that are more pressing. As a result of these and other factors, workgroups have sometimes been slow to make progress. Due to the importance of coordinated research for the MIG states, MIG-RATS, and CMS, efforts must be made to improve the effectiveness of workgroups or to identify alternative strategies for managing coordinated research efforts.

¹³ MIG-RATS is currently coordinating research on the overlap of the Medicaid Buy-In and SSDI benefit offset pilots, with the expectation that this effort will result in development of a state-authored issue brief.

E. FACILITATION OF ACCESS TO DATA NOT AVAILABLE THROUGH STATE SOURCES

Facilitation of access to data is of very high priority to MIG states. During the initial implementation of MIG-RATS, three strategies were identified to help expand the state-level information available to states from MPR's integrated data set on the Medicaid Buy-Ins. First, MIG-RATS have representation on the Interagency Work Group that discusses data sharing at the federal level and may ultimately expand the content of the integrated data set. MIG-RATS representation brings input to the process from the state perspective, with a long-range goal of extending some data sharing opportunities back to the states.

Second, an Integrated Data Request (and Review) (IDR) committee with representation from MIG states, MIG-RATS, and MPR, was challenged with the task of developing a process by which states could request customized analyses from the integrated data set.¹⁴ The process allows states to make proposals during a semi-annual submission period. If approved, MPR will conduct analyses from the integrated data set on behalf of the state(s), and return the results to the proposer. And third, a Data Dissemination Advisory (DDA) committee was convened to make recommendations for expanding the analyses MPR conducts on the data set, and therefore, the information that is available to all MIG states.

While the data request process was finalized and implemented in fall 2008 and states may now submit proposals; due to the complexity of the data set and the lack of familiarity with the data elements, the data dissemination advisory committee found it difficult to make broad recommendations for more generally disseminated information. Nonetheless, states continue to

¹⁴ In response to a request for new members for the IDR committee made through the 2008 needs inventory, fifteen individuals volunteered. The IDR committee currently has five members from among MIG state staff, two from MPR, and one from MIG-RATS.

express needs for more state-level data through alternative methods. Technical assistance requests sometimes focus on sources or availability of state-level data, and one proposal for customized analyses, submitted jointly by more than twenty MIG states, requested a myriad of state-level data to be made available to all proposers.

Because of the continuing needs and high priority of data for MIG states, MIG-RATS should consider alternatives for expanding data access. These could include both 1) expanding the information produced from the integrated data set, and 2) locating alternative sources of state-level data.

F. ACCESS TO RESEARCH INFORMATION FROM OTHER STATES AND PROJECTS

The MIG-RATS website (www.mig-rats.org) was designed to facilitate access to research information among the MIG states. It houses research products from the MIG states, as well as relevant external research. It also serves as a location for storing toolkits designed to maximize information sharing and reduce repetitive requests for direct technical support by making useful research materials readily available to all MIGs.

Two items in the new directions section of the inventory were designed to address MIG states interest in additional content for the website. The first focused on content for new Toolkits; Table 2 shows percentages of states interested in potential content areas. At fifty-eight percent, 'Analytical Tools' received interest from the greatest number of states (19 states). Each of the remaining proposed topics was of interest to less than fifty percent of the states. However, it is important to note that Toolkits are not expected to appeal to everyone. They are intended to provide a mechanism to distribute targeted information and address issues more representative of mid-level priority areas for the states. With this in mind, four of the remaining topics, 'data use

agreements’, ‘research design basics’, ‘presenting research findings’, and ‘data management’ were all considered of interest by at least one-third of respondents.

TABLE 2
CONTENT FOR RESEARCH TOOLKITS

Topic	Percent	Area of Interest	Percent
Analytical Tools	58%	Presenting Research Findings	39%
Data Use Agreements	49%	Data Management	36%
Research Design Basics	39%	Human Subjects/IRBs	21%

States were also invited to offer additional topics for Toolkit content. One state offered a suggestion, ‘Identifying Research Priorities and using data to affect policy change’. Given that this was not part of the list distributed to all states, it is difficult to determine the extent to which a Toolkit on this topic might be of general interest. However, it could be included in requests for input on future MIG-RATS activities.¹⁵

In addition to bolstering content for the Toolkit section of the website, MIG-RATS also used the inventory to identify potential areas for expanding website content more generally. Table 3 shows the percentage of responses indicating interest in various website materials. Of greatest importance to states was the inclusion of more MIG state research products on the website, which was of interest to sixty-seven percent of states (22 states). Several states were also interested in more external research products and the introduction of a topic of the quarter (or hot topic) to focus attention on specific research content areas.

¹⁵ MIG-RATS are also in the process of developing a short tool or worksheet to help states identify and focus research questions, which may partially address the interests expressed in this suggestion.

TABLE 3
ADDITIONAL MATERIAL FOR WEBSITE

Topic	Percent	Area of Interest	Percent
More State Research Products	67%	Cheese of the Month	30%
More External Research	46%	Workspace/Message Board	12%
Topic of the Quarter	42%		

Three states also provided suggestions for additional website content, although two were tongue-in-cheek responses to the proposed ‘cheese of the month’ alternative. One state suggested adding more information on training curricula and evaluation methods. The remaining two were interested in offering a wine of the month or guidance on wine and cheese pairings.

Although the MIG-RATS website has been a considerable step toward making relevant research products and tools readily available, there have been challenges to expanding content. The large number of states interested in more state and external research products reinforce the need for MIG-RATS to dig deeper to obtain information to post. The large number of states interested in many of the proposed Toolkits topics also suggests a need to place emphasis on completing a number of Toolkit development efforts.

G. GUIDANCE ON RESEARCH PROCESSES, STRATEGIES, AND ANALYSES

The final activity area for MIG-RATS was initially developed to address the variability in states’ internal research capacity to address targeted research questions, with primary activities being research workshops and direct technical assistance. Over time, the focus of this area has expanded to address CMS’ needs for input on measurement issues, by including opportunities to states for offering feedback and making recommendations on potential measurement strategies.

To gather preliminary information for a current effort to provide recommendations to CMS on possible individual-level outcomes, states were asked to indicate which of six types of initiatives their state had engaged in under the MIG. Table 4 presents the results of this item. States with relevant initiatives will be contacted to participate in group discussions on each of these topics, with a goal of developing recommendations to CMS about possibilities for measuring individual level outcomes of each.

TABLE 4
INITIATIVES FOR INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL MEASUREMENT

Topic	Percent	Area of Interest	Percent
Benefits Counseling	94%	Peer Supports	36%
Supported Employment	42%	Job Skills Training	21%
Customized Employment	42%	Trial PAS Programs	18%

The inventory was also seen as an opportunity to obtain content for a Toolkit that has been planned since MIG-RATS inception but is just now reaching development. States were asked to provide input on their professional networks and external contacts that were productive for identifying relevant research and disseminating findings from their MIG research activities. Table 5 shows the numbers of states whose MIG researchers engage in different types of professional networking.

Nearly two thirds of states indicated that their researchers attended conferences where they either learned about relevant research or disseminated findings (19 states). Nearly half read

useful journals or publications, and approximately one-third belong to relevant professional organizations. One-quarter have published MIG research in professional journals.¹⁶

TABLE 5
PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING

Topic	Percent	Area of Interest	Percent
Attend Conferences	58%	Professional Organizations	36%
Read Journals/Publications	46%	Publish in Journals	24%

Responses to the re-assessment portion of the inventory reinforce the need for MIG-RATS to maintain capacity to provide guidance through direct technical assistance. This finding is reinforced by a recent increase in requests for technical assistance received by MIG-RATS.¹⁷ In addition, in spite of increases in internal research capacity in some MIG states, several states still consider themselves to have limited internal capacity, and access to support for certain types of research activities remains relevant. Finally, the need to bring state input on research and measurement issues important to CMS is also expected to continue to increase. These factors make ongoing availability of MIG-RATS to offer guidance on research processes and strategies an important priority.

¹⁶ It is important to consider that states were able to indicate as many as apply. Thirty percent of states (10 states) reported that their researchers didn't engage in any professional activities. States that do not have MIG researchers may have also indicated that there was no participation in professional outlets.

¹⁷ During the first approximately two years of MIG-RATS, through June 2008, requests for technical assistance averaged 2.23/month. In the most recent six months of MIG-RATS, July 2008 – December 2008, requests have averaged 5.67/month.

RECOMMENDATIONS

MIG states responses to the re-assessment section of the 2008 MIG-RATS research needs inventory reinforce the importance of coordination of interests, coordination of activities, and assistance in accessing federal data as priorities for MIG-RATS. These findings, coupled with experience from two years of MIG-RATS operations, support continued implementation of the four main MIG-RATS activity areas. Recommendations for expansion and next steps in each of these areas follow:

1. ***Facilitation of multi-state research efforts.*** This area remains the topic priority for MIG-RATS. States continue to look to MIG-RATS in a coordination role, and interests in a number of possible topical workgroups is high.

MIG-RATS are currently planning to launch a new research workgroup during the April Employment Summit. Based on state responses, we recommend this workgroup be designed to address issues of conducting research with youth in transition.

Due to the high level of interest in potential workgroups, we also recommend exploring options for launching a second workgroup within the six months following the Employment Summit.

Interest among MIG states for engaging in collaborative research projects was also very high. We recommend exploring the potential to initiate collaborative research projects on youth in transition and researching states as a model employer.

Finally, we recommend investigating strategies to improve the effectiveness of MIG-RATS workgroups.

2. ***Facilitation of access to data not available through state sources.*** This area also remains a very high priority for MIG-RATS.

We recommend that CMS, MPR, and MIG-RATS consider the extent to which data from the integrated data set are currently available to states and consider opportunities for expanding the state-level data that are available.

In addition, we recommend increasing efforts to locate additional sources of state-level data that can be shared with the MIG states.

Finally, we recommend utilizing the MIG-RATS website to make more information about the data elements housed in various sources more accessible to states.

3. ***Access to research information from other states and projects.*** The MIG-RATS website continues to be of great importance to states as a source of research information from the MIGs and other relevant sources. We recommend strengthening the utility of this site, by increasing the numbers of internal and external research products posted.

As a strategy to identify historical MIG products, we recommend introducing a topic of the quarter to collect research products not currently accessible through mechanized channels.

Finally, we recommend development and release of a research Toolkit every six months, beginning with analytical tools and data use agreements. If resources allow, we would like to increase the pace of Toolkit development to accommodate quarterly distribution.

4. ***Guidance on research processes, strategies, and analyses.*** This area also remains a priority for addressing the targeted needs of MIG states, as well as the measurement-oriented goals of CMS for the MIGs. We recommend that MIG-RATS expand capacity to respond to direct technical assistance requests, as well as to assist in providing MIG state input to CMS.

Finally, we recommend revisiting MIG-RATS original intention to facilitate access to sophisticated technical support at MPR, and to better publicize this opportunity to MIG state researchers.

Above we offer several recommendations for next steps in MIG-RATS activities and operations. While a number of these can be accommodated within the current MIG-RATS work plan, some would require a considerable expansion of MIG-RATS efforts and staff resources, both among MIG-RATS staff directly and supporting staff at MPR. Ideally, the opportunity would arise for increasing MIG-RATS resources so that a more extensive set of recommendations can be fulfilled.

Finally, we recognize the continued importance of MIG state input in directing the priorities and activities of MIG-RATS. While this formal assessment process has been useful for reaffirming the activity areas and identifying next steps, we question whether MIG state input can be obtained through a less formal structure and at a lesser burden to states. Perhaps future

input into MIG-RATS activities can be obtained through a feedback form during the annual Employment Summit.

APPENDIX A

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

A.1 MIG-RATS 2008 Needs Inventory Cover Memo

To: MIG Researchers and Directors

From: Anne Reither and Amy Porter
Directors, MIG – Research Assistance to States

Date: August 8, 2008

Re: **MIG-RATS 2008 Research Needs Inventory**

Believe it or not, it has been two years since we conducted the original research needs inventory for MIG-RATS. Based on the findings from that inventory, we set the original agenda and work plan for the MIG research resource center. The research needs and interests you identified established our goals of increased research coordination, access to data, access to research information, and guidance on research processes that have resulted in many MIG-RATS activities and products, including:

- workgroups on benefits counseling service delivery and outcomes research
- a process for requesting data analyses from MPR's integrated data set, due to be released in September
- the MIG-RATS website where research on employment and disability (from the MIGs and elsewhere) are easily accessible
- workshops and toolkits on conducting research activities such as focus groups, research design, and enrollment and cost estimation

It is now time to update the MIG-RATS plan with new activities and new directions to better meet the changing needs of the MIG researchers. Since MIG-RATS continues to be driven by the needs and interests of the MIG researchers, we would like each state to complete a short research needs inventory. The inventory will help us to assure that the general types of research support previously identified continue to be relevant to states. It will also help us to focus upcoming activities to best meet the interests of the MIG researchers.

The inventory can be completed by going to the following web address:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=HpKWAt6ewgL2Pr_2fkITSZVA_3d_3d

The password is MIG-RATS-NEEDS. When completing the inventory, you should consider all research projects being conducted under your MIG – not just the activities with Medicaid Buy-In enrollees as the research population. You do not need to complete the inventory all at once, but you will not be able to scroll forward through the inventory without responding to the questions. Therefore, we have provided a copy of the inventory as a Word document for your convenience. Please use the attached to assist you as you develop your responses, but submit your completed survey online.

Your assistance in this process is vital. **We ask that each state complete one inventory and submit it online by Wednesday, August 27, 2008.** Please be sure to include the community of researchers involved in MIG projects within your state when completing this inventory, regardless of whether they are directly staffed under the MIG or work as consultants to you. Participation in MIG-RATS is voluntary; states may or may not utilize supports as they choose. However, now is the time when our upcoming activities are being determined, and your contributions will help to assure that MIG-RATS will have something useful to offer you.

If you have any questions about this inventory or the MIG-RATS in general, please contact Anne Reither (areither@gmail.com or 435 757-9314). Thank you in advance for your response!

A.2 MIG-RATS 2008 Needs Inventory

State: _____ Person completing this inventory: _____

Part I. of the Research Needs Inventory is an update of information we collected when MIG-RATS was established. Updating this information will help us to understand how MIG state researchers' needs have changed. It will also offer an opportunity for new MIG states to provide input in the overall priorities for MIG-RATS.

1. To help us understand states' needs and interests better, we would like you to give us some indication of your within-state research capacities. This will help us to assure that the center can offer support to MIG states at all levels of research activity. Please mark which of the following best describes your state's research planning and analytical capacity.

_____ **Freshman.** Your state is just beginning to think about research activities.

_____ **Sophomore.** You have begun to do research under your MIG, but could use assistance thinking through a research agenda and maximizing your state's research efforts.

_____ **Junior.** You have done a considerable amount of research work but may be interested in having support for specific types of research activities or analyses. You might also be interested in being involved in collaborative research activities and products, but you do not currently have the capacity to offer support to other states that may need assistance with their research efforts.

_____ **Senior.** You have done a considerable amount of research work but may be interested in having support for specific types of research activities or analyses. You might also be interested in being involved in collaborative research activities and products, and you do have the capacity to offer support to other states that may need assistance with their research efforts.

2. Several different types of research support are listed below. Please indicate how useful each of the listed supports would be for your state. You may also offer other types of support that we have not included; add as many as you would like. Please provide information about how useful each of your added supports would be.

	Not Useful Don't do			Moderately Useful		Very Useful Make it a priority
	1	2	3	4	5	
A. Assistance in developing research designs or plans to evaluate specific MIG activities	1	2	3	4	5	
B. Assistance in identifying potential sources of in-state administrative data to meet project evaluation and performance-based measurement needs	1	2	3	4	5	
C. Assistance in identifying potential sources of federal administrative data to meet project evaluation needs	1	2	3	4	5	
D. Guidance in acquiring and protecting data, such as developing MOUs or consent/release forms and human subjects considerations	1	2	3	4	5	
E. Assistance in developing or identifying research tools, such as surveys or focus groups, for use in state projects	1	2	3	4	5	
F. Technical assistance for selecting and performing statistical analyses	1	2	3	4	5	
G. Coordination of similar research activities across states, such as helping to standardize survey questions or data sources or replicate analyses	1	2	3	4	5	
H. Coordination of research interests across states, such as helping connect states that are conducting research on similar topics	1	2	3	4	5	
I. Facilitation of research product development, such as policy papers or articles for publication, issue briefs	1	2	3	4	5	
J. Other _____	1	2	3	4	5	
K. Other _____	1	2	3	4	5	

Part II. of the Research Needs Inventory collects your suggestions to develop a direction for upcoming MIG-RATS activities within our existing priority areas. Your input on activities and areas of emphasis will help us to better support your interests, coordinate efforts, and be responsive to research needs.

3. One priority area for MIG-RATS has been coordination of research on similar topics. This has been accomplished through MIG-RATS research workgroups, such as the benefits counseling service delivery and benefits counseling outcomes workgroups. We are interested in expanding our research workgroups. If we were to add workgroups to discuss research on any of the following topics, in which would your state participate? *(Mark all that apply.)*

- Ticket to Work
- Supported Employment
- Peer Supports
- Youth in Transition
- Employer Surveys
- Employer Networks
- Research with specific target populations – mental illness
- Research with specific target populations – developmental disabilities
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

4. Do you have any research projects planned that you would like to coordinate with other states, if other states have similar projects under development?

- Yes (What topic? _____)
- No

5. The MIG-RATS website includes a Toolkit section to help MIG researchers build their own research projects. To help us prioritize our efforts, which of the following Toolkit offerings would be most helpful for you? *(Please mark no more than 2.)*

- Research Design Basics
- Data Use Agreements
- Research with Human Subjects/IRB process
- Data Management
- Analytical Tools (statistics, quantitative methods)
- Presenting research findings
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

6. Aside from more Toolkits (see question 5), what additional information would you like to see on the MIG-RATS website?

- Workspace/Message Boards
- Topic of the Quarter/Hot Topics
- More State Research Products
- More External Research Products
- Cheese of the Month
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

7. CMS is currently considering developing some additional individual-level measures to better capture the MIG initiatives that occur in addition to the Medicaid Buy-Ins. Individual-level measures would be developed in coordination with states, and reported by states, that engage in each particular type of initiative under the MIG. The following initiatives are being considered; which of these are happening in your state and are supported at least in part by MIG funds? (Mark all that apply.)

- Trial programs on PAS delivery
- Customized employment strategies (eg., job carving)
- Programs or waivers for supported employment
- Training programs for consumers on basic job skills
- Peer support networks
- Benefits counseling services

8. MIG-RATS would like to help MIG researchers expand their capacity to disseminate research findings and learn from similar research conducted outside of the MIGs. Do MIG researchers in your state belong to any professional organizations, attend any conferences, or read any journals or publications where they have learned about other research on disability and employment or published your state's MIG research findings?

- Yes, membership in professional organization (go to 8a)
- Yes, attend conferences (go to 8b)
- Yes, read journals/publications (go to 8c)
- Yes, publish in journals (go to 8d)
- No

8a. To which organizations do your researchers belong? _____

8b. Which conferences do your researchers attend? _____

8c. Which journals or publications do your researchers find useful? _____

8d. In which journals did your researchers publish? _____

9. MIG-RATS is currently looking for volunteers from among the state researchers to review proposals from the states for having customized analyses conducted on MPR's integrated data set on the Medicaid Buy-Ins (the data set developed from federal data using the finder files submitted by the MIG states). Reviews would happen twice a year (in November and May); participating in the review committee would not prevent you or your state from submitting a proposal.

Would you or another researcher in your state be interested in serving as a reviewer?

- Yes Name and e-mail: _____
- No

Thank you for your time and input!

APPENDIX B

OPEN-ENDED INVENTORY RESPONSES

B.1 Would you like to provide any additional information about your responses (about research supports)? & What additional type of research support would you like the center to offer?

- *Coordination* - Our main hope for MIG-RATS is that it can facilitate research collaboration between states to expand the body of knowledge.
- *Coordination* - Research workgroups: Supported Employment, Youth in Transition, Mental health and DD target populations, Ticket to Work
- *Federal Data* - The issue isn't so much identification of sources but (1) getting good information about specific data elements and (2) above all else help in gaining access to individual level data.
- *Research Products* - We write our own Policy papers and briefs, however, perhaps where MIG-RATS could help is on the wider dissemination of these briefs so that they get into the right hands and are read by the right people.
- *Research Products* - There is some interest in having better information about where/how to disseminate research products.
- *Technical Assistance* - The need is project driven (e.g. technical issues involved in implementing time series and/or hierarchical models, use of Social Network Techniques) rather than generic. The preferred solution would be for MIG-RATS (through MPR?) to establish free or low cost technical assistance to help with such issues as they arise.
- *Technical Assistance* - Since we will be developing a database system that collects data from different agency systems (like VR, DD, MI, etc), to address policy and funding issues related to employment, a prototype of an employment data system might be useful.

B.2 What additional workgroups would you like the center to offer?

- SSDI \$1-for-2 Benefit Offset Demonstration
- Veterans
- Service Utilization and Finance
- Benefits Planning
- Medicaid Buy-In
- Effectiveness of media campaigns
- Research related to pre/post Buy-In enrollment (i.e. looking at what their services, supports, eligibility categories, income looked like before enrollment in the buy-in).
- Comparison group research... How do Buy-in participants compare to the general Medicaid population, other Medicaid beneficiaries with disabilities, etc.
- Physical disabilities
- Single Integrated Community Case planning
- Training Evaluation
- Medicaid Buy-In
- PAS in the Workplace
- Public Relations with Businesses
- Surveying workers with disabilities

B.3 What research topics would you like to try to coordinate with other states?

- SSDI \$1-for-2 Benefit Offset Demonstration
- SSDI Benefit Offset Pilots
- youth transitioning into adult programs
- Survey of Transition Activities in School Systems
- State Government as a model employer, including state employee surveys and focus groups
- state as a model employer surveys
- buy-in participants
- Longitudinal assessment of employment outcomes and use of SSA disability benefits among buy-in program participants, using state wage data and SSA data
- MBI EVALUATION-COST/BENEFITS ANALYSIS OF MEMBER PARTICIPATION
- Comparison group research (buy-in compared to other Medicaid populations and/or those who have income, but choose not to enroll in buy-in)
- Buy-in premiums and average earnings
- SSI versus Buy in populations
- Supported Employment Survey of Medicaid Buy-In Enrollees
- TANF applicants needing Medicaid Buy-In
- Using CDPS Systems to classify recipient disability types
- Evaluation of pilot project to move persons with DD from day habilitation and group housing to community employment and supported housing
- State Tax data
- modeling the relationships between healthcare outcomes and employment outcomes
- Public Relations with Businesses
- employment of their college graduates with disabilities
- assessment of needs and promising practices that support employment of people with disabilities
- people who use PAS in the workplace
- Service Utilization