

# Building Objective Evidence about the Impact of Social Programs

*Presented by: Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) at Notre Dame*

*MNN Webinar Date: January 17, 2018*

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- We will have time for **Q&A**. Please enter your questions in the chat box at any time.
- This webinar is being recorded, and we will distribute the **recording** after the webinar.



**Marta Hodgkins-Sumner**  
Director of Membership and Programs





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# BUILDING OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE ABOUT THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Date:

*January 17, 2018*

# WEBINAR OVERVIEW

1. Types of evaluation
2. “Causal” program evaluations – objective, unique benefits
3. About LEO
4. Case studies
5. Next steps – partnering with LEO

# POVERTY IN THE U.S.

- Estimated \$1T spent annually



**\$200  
Billion**



**\$800  
Billion**

- Gains, still 41M in poverty
- Nearly 1 in 5 children

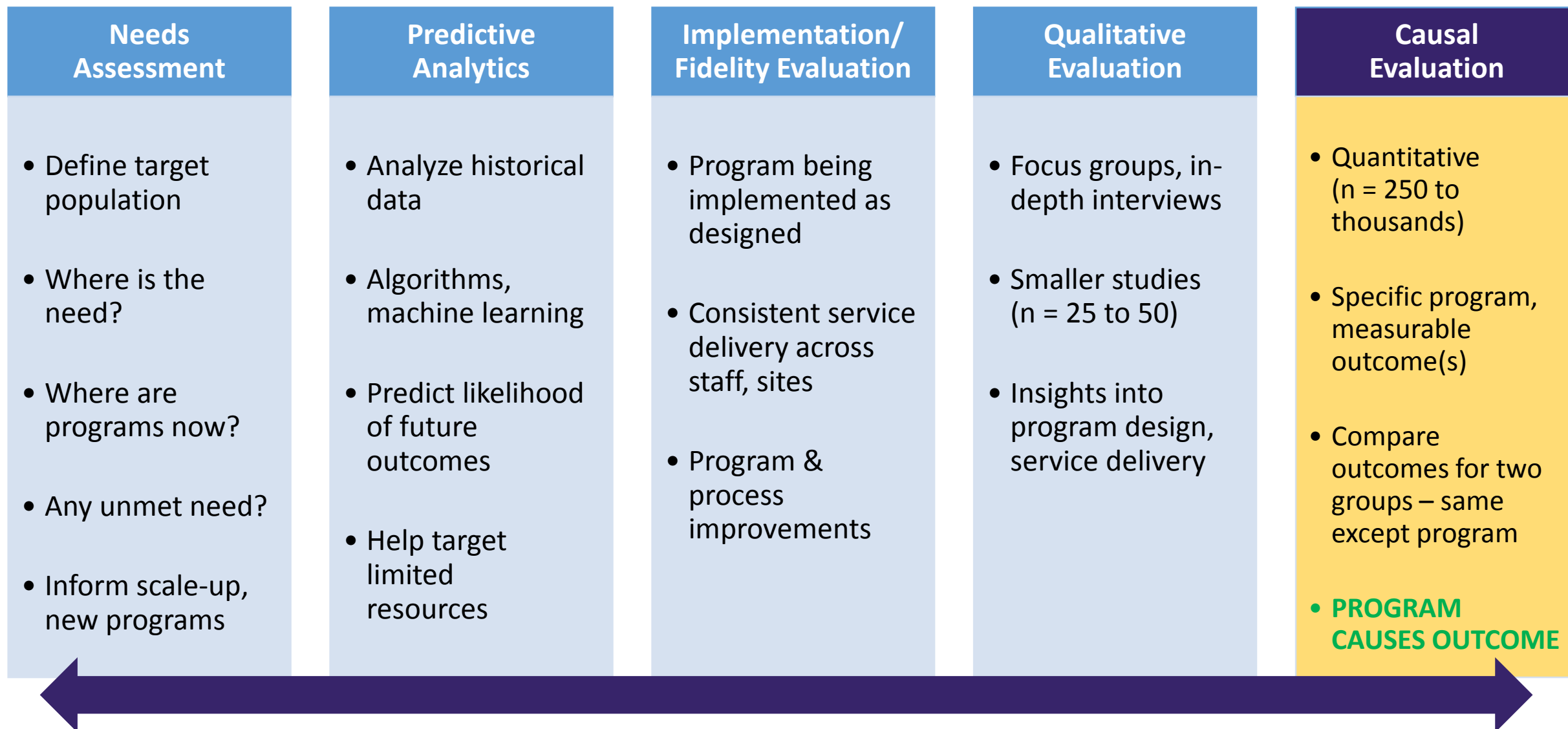


As little as 1% of programs  
backed by hard evidence

# TYPES OF EVALUATION



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1. Isolate program impact – two groups, program only difference



- Unable to serve everyone eligible and **equal opportunity enrollment**
- Cut-off point (e.g., 2 x FPL, age 65) and large # just above/below

2. Study size – LEO studies range from 250 (125 + 125) to thousands

- Several research options meet causality threshold:
  - Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT) – gold standard
  - Other options
- Explore options based on specific program – customize







- Multiple RCTs – NY, TN, CO
- Positive effects – child abuse/neglect, maternal employment
- Expanded to 42 states, served over 250K families to date

“We decided to double down on things we know work for families in poverty... We can’t do that by relying on our favorite client success story. We need an unbiased examination of our work.”

*- Heather Reynolds, President and CEO, CCFW*

THE CHRONICLE OF  
**PHILANTHROPY**

# FUNDERS & CAUSAL EVIDENCE



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COMMISSION ON EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING



# ABOUT LEO

# LEO OVERVIEW

- Nonpartisan research center (2012)
- Economics Department, Notre Dame
- Permanent research team
- National network of Faculty Affiliates
- Causal evaluations

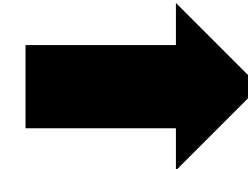
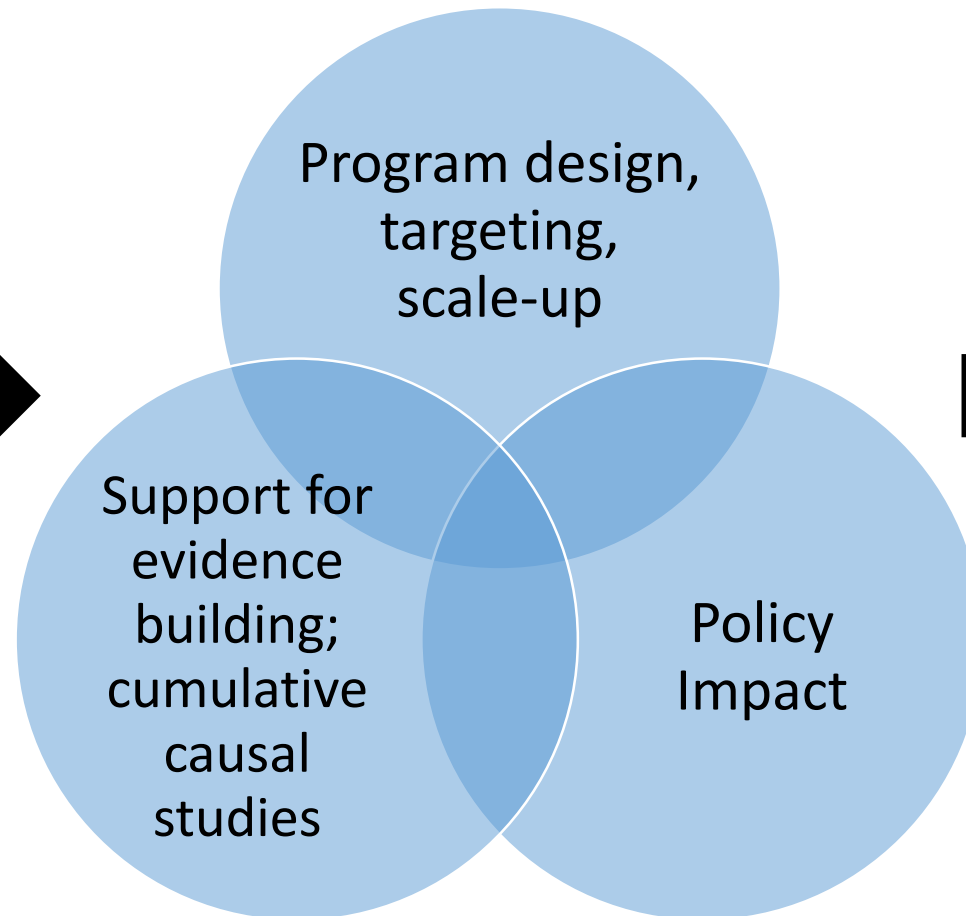
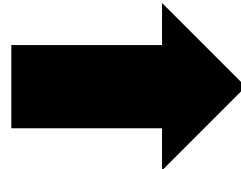


## Vision

*Reducing poverty and improving lives through  
evidence-based programs and policies*

## Inform Key Decisions

LEO causal  
program  
evaluations



Reduce  
poverty &  
improve lives

# KEY ACTIVITIES



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1. Match
2. Evaluate
3. Information-sharing



## Focus Areas

- Housing
- Health
- Criminal Justice
- Education
- Self-Sufficiency

## Populations

- Single adults
- Families
- Youth – child welfare, detention
- Seniors
- Refugees
- Formerly incarcerated
- Very low-income

# LEO PARTNERS: EXAMPLES



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- **Pilot-Test:** Pilot-test new program before scale-up
- **Improve:** Improve new, existing program model
- **Target:** Better target limited resources
- **Fundraise:** Expand fundraising, partnership opportunities
- **Communications:** Spread the word about effective programs



# LEO CASE STUDIES



STAY  THE COURSE

- Community college persistence low in U.S.
- Only 39% of students have earned a degree after 6 years
- Higher education affects employment, earnings

# EVALUATION PARTNERS



# EVALUATION OVERVIEW

CRITERIA	STUDY DESCRIPTION
LEO Focus Area	Education
Measurable Outcome(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community college persistence</li><li>• Degree completion</li></ul> <u>Time-bound</u> : 6 semesters
Research Design	RCT
Study Size & Target Population	869 low-income community college students (for STC)
Evaluation Timeline	4 years
Data Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• National Student Clearinghouse</li><li>• Community college partner</li><li>• Nonprofit partner</li></ul>



# PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

- Age 18 or older
- Registered for 9 or more credits
- Pell eligible or below 200% FPL
- Degree seeking
- GPA > 2.0 or first time student
- Passed at least one TSI Exam

# INNOVATIVE PROGRAM

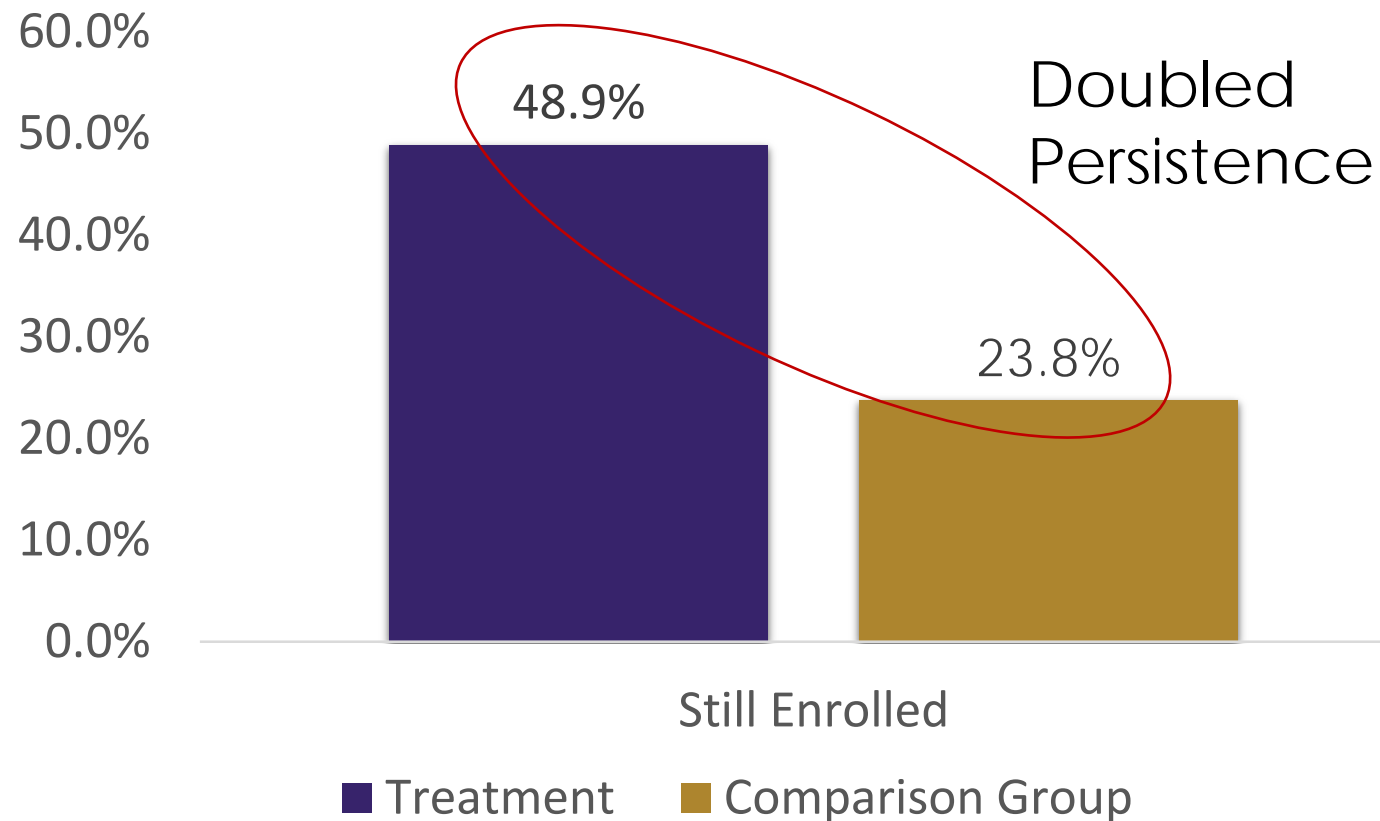
- Students assigned a “Navigator”
- Student outlines goals
- Assess strengths, weaknesses
- Develop “service plan” together
- Emergency financial assistance
- 3 years of service



*If/how does the Stay the Course program impact persistence and completion among low-income community college students at Tarrant County College in Texas after 6 semesters?*

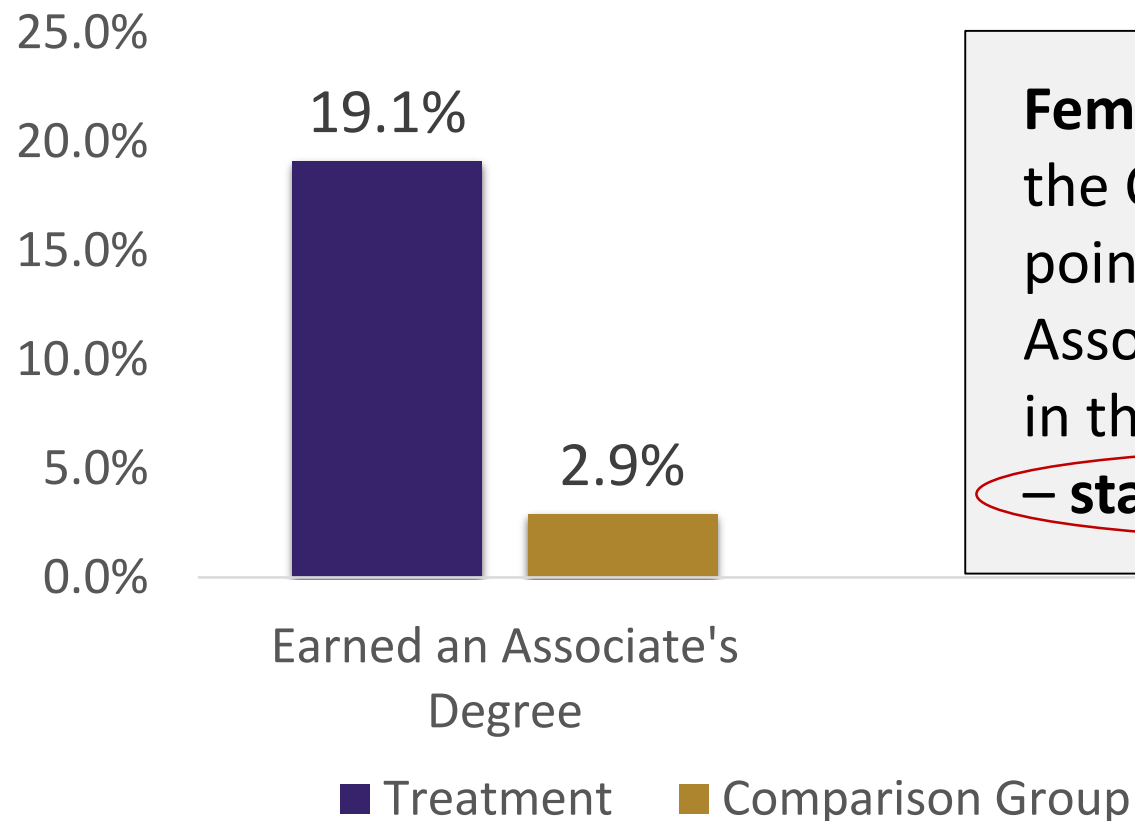
# KEY FINDINGS

## Fall 2013 Cohort after Six Semesters



# KEY FINDINGS

## Fall 2013 Cohort after Six Semesters



**Females** who participated in Stay the Course were 31.5 percentage points more likely to earn an Associate's Degree than females in the relevant comparison group – **statistically significant.**



How did partners go from  
interest in “causal” evaluation  
to launching the evaluation  
and sharing results?

## Staff Consensus

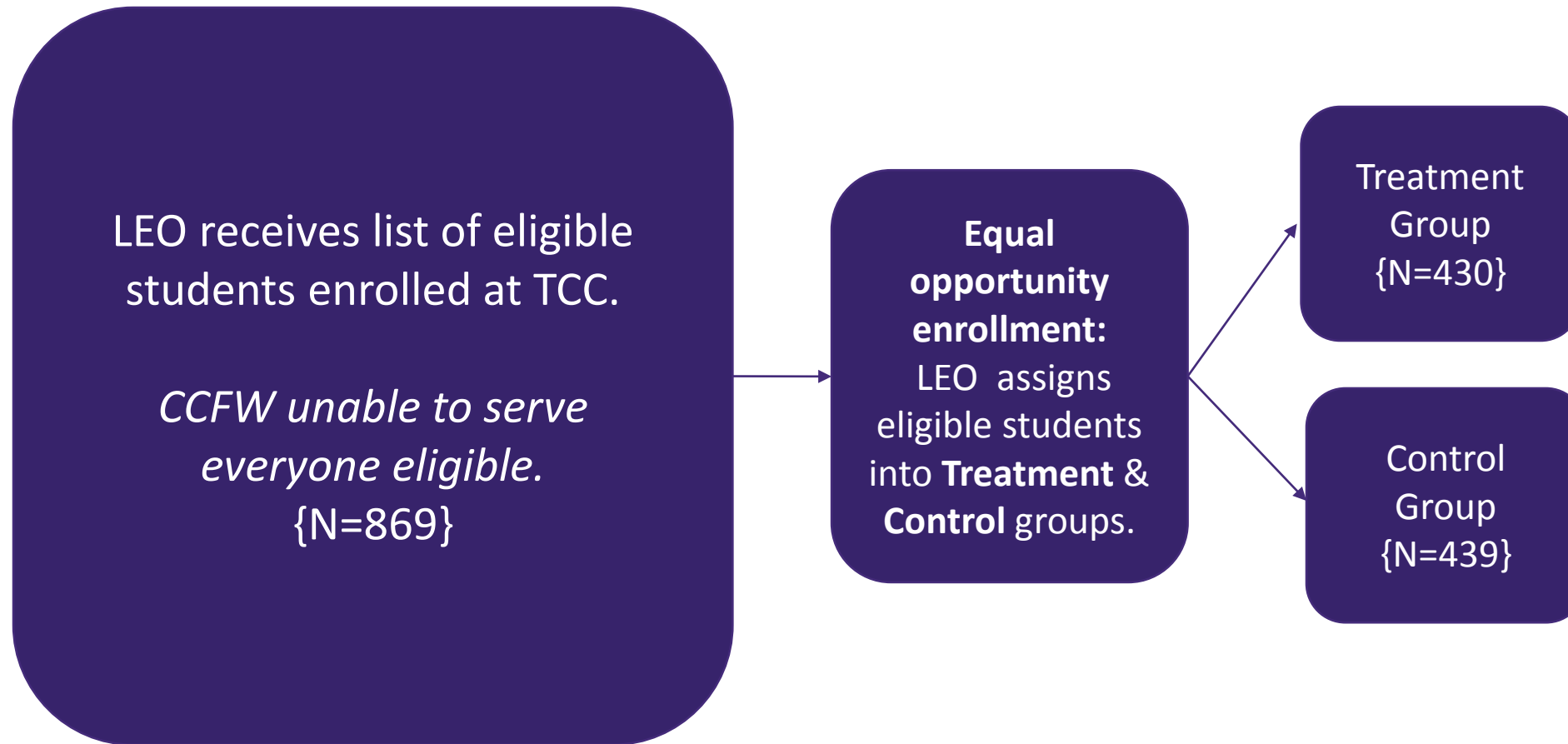
- Executive Director
- Program, IT, evaluation, other
- Commitment to learning: positive, null, negative
- Point person for evaluation: timely communications, authority

## Feasibility Assessment

- Identify two comparable groups – same except program
- Study size – causal analysis
- Data sources – multiple, Data Sharing Agreement



# TWO COMPARABLE GROUPS



## Feasibility Assessment (continued)

- Program fidelity
  - CCFW – staff trainings, monitoring
  - Qualitative component
- IRB approval – ethical, study consent
- Ongoing information exchanges to identify causal design

## Evaluation Launch & Monitoring

- MOU
- Regular conference calls
- Jointly address questions, issues

- NBER Working Paper – certify reliable, causal results
- LEO Policy Brief
- Press release
- LEO social media
- Presentations

## LEO POLICY BRIEF

December 2017

### CASE MANAGEMENT CAN IMPROVE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION

#### THE ISSUE

Community colleges provide a low-cost education with high private rates of return for recipients. Completion significantly increases earnings and decreases unemployment for graduates compared to those with only a high school diploma. Despite these benefits, degree completion rates are staggeringly low: Six years after enrolling for the first time at a community college, only 39 percent of students have received some degree or certificate. Some have remained in school, but nearly 42 percent of students have dropped out. Addressing this completion crisis is crucial to improving the educational attainment and ultimately economic trajectory for more Americans.



First-time community college students who drop out



Jobs in the economy that will require postsecondary education and training

#### CURRENT SOLUTIONS

Existing research points to four broad explanations for the low rate of persistence and completion among community college students: 1) cost of college attendance, 2) academic under-preparation, 3) personal non-academic obstacles, and 4) social and institutional obstacles. While survey evidence suggests that the latter two sets of impediments are important, current policy initiatives and research have focused primarily on costs and academic issues.

#### STAY THE COURSE SOLUTION

An innovative, new program, Stay the Course, has been designed to address the personal, non-academic, social, and institutional barriers to success in college. Stay the Course has two main components: case management and emergency financial assistance. Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW) designed Stay the Course and currently operates on two campuses of Tarrant County College.

#### LEO'S STUDY

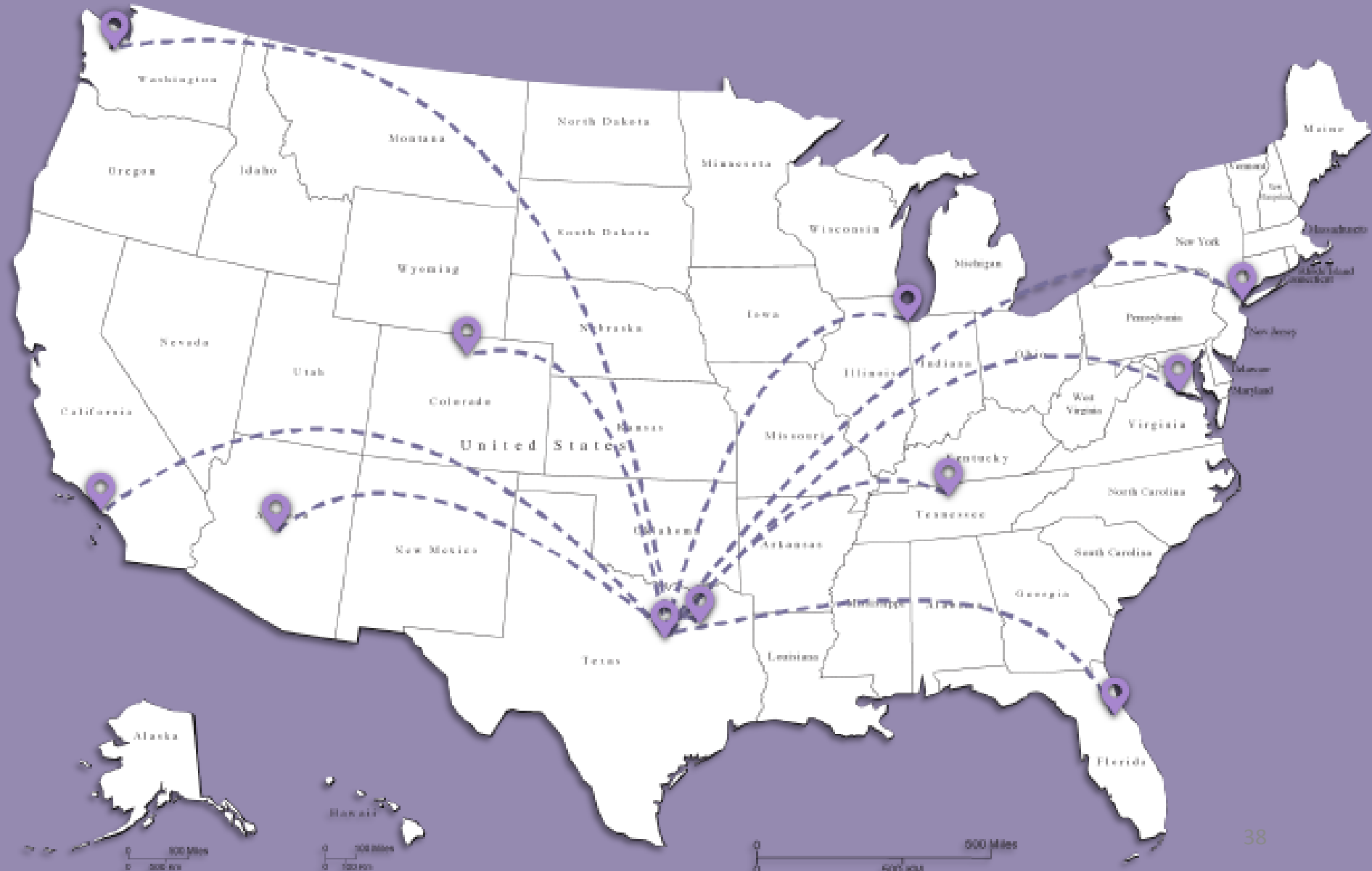
To measure the effectiveness of Stay the Course, LEO scholars designed a randomized controlled trial evaluation. To be eligible to participate in this study, students need to satisfy a set of enrollment criteria that emphasize feasibility of degree completion (currently enrolled in at least 9 credit hours, a GPA of at least 2.0, degree seeking, meet at least one remedial standard), low-income status, and being at risk of dropping out (excludes those with more than 30 credit hours accumulated thus far). Eligible students were randomly assigned to one of three groups: (1) the Stay the Course treatment group, which are offered comprehensive case management services as well as access to emergency financial assistance; (2) the emergency financial assistance only group; or (3) the control group, which are not eligible for Stay the Course services, but otherwise have full access to any existing college or community services, just as they would in the absence of this intervention.

- **Partnership:** Nonprofits in community colleges
- **College Success:** Case management, not just financial aid
- **Targeting:** Differences in impact for females vs. males
- **Fundraising:** Nonprofit leveraged LEO evaluation for fundraising

# Strategy

**Replicate  
Effective  
Programs:**  
CCFW  
packaging Stay  
the Course,  
trainings

**Cumulative  
Evidence  
Building:**  
Additional  
causal  
evaluations





# County in California: Rapid Rehousing (Developing)

*If/how do Rapid Rehousing services impact housing stability, health, and criminal justice system contact among homeless single adults in the County?*



- **Measurable Outcomes:** Shelter entry, hospital entry, arrests
- **Evaluation Partners:** County, one nonprofit service provider, LEO
- **Causal Study Design:** RCT
  - *Two Groups:* Unable to serve everyone eligible
  - *Equal Opportunity Enrollment:* Yes
  - *Study Size:* 360 unique individuals
  - *Outcome Data:* County administrative data

# KEY TO CAUSAL EVALUATION

1. Define target population – common, consistent
  - Cluster of risk scores, define “single adult” and “homeless”
2. Digitize the screening process
  - New tablets – loaded paper-based intake/eligibility questions
3. Equal opportunity enrollment, on the spot
  - Via tablets – Survey CTO
4. LEO train nonprofit staff, ongoing support



# Causal Evaluation: Good Fit?

## Program

- Replicable program – clear components, length
- Measurable outcomes (vs. outputs), time-bound
- Mechanisms to ensure program fidelity
- High program take-up, completion rates
- Compelling reason to evaluate, key question of interest

## Research: Causal Evaluations

- Two groups – same except program
- Study size – 250 to thousands, may aggregate over time
- Outcome data – both participants, comparison group
  - Nonprofit
  - Administrative data: County, hospital, school, police, state, other – *LEO can link different data sets*

## Agency

- Electronic data tracking
- Commitment to objective learning
- Highly engaged partnership
- Staff point person
- Support information sharing



# Next Steps

# PARTNERING WITH LEO

1. [leo.nd.edu](http://leo.nd.edu)
2. Request project consultation: one-on-one
3. Promising projects: Application for Feasibility Assessment
4. Likely to launch: Feasibility Assessment
5. Evaluation
6. Information Sharing

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# Questions?