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# 2023 SRCD Federal Policy Fellow Spotlight: Marissa Abbott, Ph.D.

Marissa Abbott is a former SRCD Executive Branch Fellow and Current Social Science Analyst in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE).

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SRCD Federal Executive Branch Fellow  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for  
Planning and Evaluation

AUTHOR

## In a few sentences, what is your role at the agency you work for?

During my fellowship, I was placed in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) within the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). ASPE is a uniquely positioned policy research office that advises the HHS Secretary on a wide array of issues and is therefore well-situated to respond to requests across the catalog of health and human services programs.

In my fellowship at ASPE, I worked in the Division of Data and Technical Analysis (DTA) within the Office of Human Services Policy (HSP). As a part of the DTA team, I supported the child welfare and well-being portfolios, including child welfare data linking efforts. After completing my fellowship early, I accepted a position in ASPE as a Social Science Analyst in the Division of Children and Youth Policy in HSP.

**What interested you in becoming an SRCD Policy Fellow?**

I was interested in exploring a career in public service and wanted to get a better understanding of what it is like to work for the federal government as a policy researcher. I hoped to apply my public health, social work, and developmental science background to child welfare and other intersecting human services issues. I also wanted to gain a better understanding of government research management.

**How do you think the fellowship has helped further your career?**

When I transitioned from the fellowship to a career in public service, I felt fortunate to have been placed in ASPE and given the autonomy to work on and lead projects related to my interests and expertise. I started my new position at ASPE/HSP as a Social Science Analyst in the Division of Children and Youth Policy about seven months ago. I have since been able to propose and manage new research projects, conduct my own research, participate in the federal budgeting process, and plan and execute a child welfare convening, building upon my knowledge and expertise while gaining several new and valuable skills.

**What words of wisdom might you pass on to someone who is interested in SRCD's fellowship program?**

Take a chance and apply for the fellowship! I did not think I was a competitive applicant and almost closed myself off from this incredible professional development opportunity. I am so grateful that I stepped outside my comfort zone and set myself up for success through this program. I would not have gained the same insight into the plethora of non-academic jobs, especially federal jobs, available to policy researchers without this experience.

**What piqued your interest in working in policy?**

Before my doctoral education, I had completed a state government epidemiology fellowship. Then, when I returned to graduate school, I was lucky to work with ASPE through the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As a project assistant with IRP, I also worked with the Wisconsin

Department of Children and Families and the Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board. I should have had an inkling that I would end up back in the policy world, but I needed to finish my dissertation to see that I wanted to do more applied policy research and management.

**What do you like to do in your free time?**

In my free time, I teach barre3 fitness classes and like to spend time with my partner and two pups, Clark and Addison! We've enjoyed exploring all the DC has to offer.