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Monica King  
*University of Pennsylvania*

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## Conversation with Richard Clinch from the Jacob France Institute

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## Conversation with Richard Clinch from the Jacob France Institute

January 30, 2018

Monica King

*Dr. Richard Clinch is the Executive Director of the [Jacob France Institute](#) based at the University of Baltimore's Merrick School of Business. He recently joined the ADRF Network working group on Data Sharing Governance and Management. We spoke to Richard about his work at the Jacob France Institute and the new challenges and opportunities emerging in this space.*

### **Integrated Wage Records Data**

The Jacob France Institute has a long history in the administrative data space, particularly in working with integrated wage records data. For over 30 years, the Institute has served as a data intermediary – warehousing wage records from the Maryland Department of Labor, providing the data to qualified researchers, and conducting research with the data. The focus of its research often involves linking these wage records to welfare and education data. “The common front of our research is working outcomes of training, welfare, and social services programs,” Clinch says.

While the Maryland wage records archives represent a majority of their work, the Jacob France Institute has two other major business units. The first is an arm that conducts economic development research. Clinch himself has created a number of economic development strategies for the state of Maryland and several counties in his 20 years at the Institute prior to assuming the role of Executive Director. Yet another arm of the Jacob France Institute houses the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, which is part of Urban Institute's [National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership](#).

### **New Research Capacities**

Clinch and his team are expanding the Institute's core capacity with administrative data research. Clinch explains, “Right now we're doing a lot of work for the Baltimore City Department of Social Services on identifying the best transitional path from welfare to work in the city.” With the support of local foundations, they are creating a system to measure and evaluate the impacts of different types of training on educational and welfare outcomes.

Much of this new work involves integrating individual-level wage data with neighborhood-level data from the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance to gain a better understanding of the neighborhood dynamics at play. “We have these very rich datasets at the individual level and at the city geography level, and we're trying to bring those together,” Clinch explains.

### **Challenges in the Space**

The new opportunities with administrative data do not come without challenges. In addition to facing the technical challenges of maintaining a high level of data security, Clinch talks about an often-overlooked challenge: setting expectations for data users.

Although the Jacob France Institute warehouses the wage data, researchers who wish to use the data must go through a formal approval process with the Maryland Department of Labor, which sets specific rules governing how these data can be accessed and what kinds of questions can be answered with these data. “People think administrative data are a wonderful resource – and it *is* a wonderful resource. But we have to control expectations of what can and can’t be done with the data,” Clinch explains.

### **Peer Networks as Resources**

In his second year as Executive Director of the Jacob France Institute, Clinch is becoming more involved with groups such as [C2ER](#) and the ADRF Network. “In the past, we have relied a lot on our own resources because we were founded by one of the original people who started doing administrative wage record research,” Clinch explains. He looks forward to new opportunities to engage in peer-to-peer knowledge sharing through these networks.