
STATE TANF CASE STUDIES: IN-DEPTH PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction

Thank you so much for meeting with me today. My name is _____ and I am with a company called [Mathematica or MEF Associates]. We are independent researchers assisting the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on a study to learn more about innovative employment programs that aim to help people get and keep jobs, and link them to the services they need to be successful. As part of this study, we are talking to people like you to better understand people's experiences with and views about [name of program].

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Our conversation will take about 90 minutes. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. The OMB number for this information collection is XXXX-XXXX and the expiration date is XX/XX/XXXX. During our conversation, anything you say will be private, except if you say something that suggests you are very likely to harm yourself, that you are planning to hurt another person or child, or that someone is likely to harm you. We also won't use your name or any other identifying information when we report the results of our study. We also won't share what you say with [name of program] or any other program. You do not have to answer any question you don't want to answer.

Please remember that we are interested in your experiences and opinions; there are no right or wrong answers. My hope is that you will feel comfortable talking with me, but, if at any time I ask you a question and you don't feel comfortable talking about the topic, feel free to say so and we will move on. In appreciation for participating in the interview, we will give you a \$20 gift card.

I would like to record our conversation so I don't miss anything. No one will hear the recording except for researchers and the person who transcribes it. Is it okay with you if I record this conversation? If you want me to turn the recorder off for any reason or at any time, just say so. [INTERVIEWER: TURN THE RECORDER ON, SPECIFY YOUR NAME, THE RESPONDENT'S FIRST NAME, DATE, AND LOCATION]

Public Burden Statement

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0970-xxxx. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 90 minutes including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate to Girley Wright; girley.wright@acf.hhs.gov.

A. Respondent background

I'm first interested in getting some background information about you and your family to get to know you.

1. Tell me about your home and who you're living with right now.
 - How are you related to them?
 - How old are your children? And how old are you?
 - Where are you living now? Is it your own place or are you staying with friends or family?
 - How far away is it from [the program location]?
2. How many different places have you lived during the past two years?
3. Has it been easy to find places to live that meet your family's needs? Why/why not?
4. Tell me about how far you got in school. [Probe: Did you complete high school? Get a GED? Training programs? College? When did you complete most recent schooling?]
5. Are you currently in school or a training program? What school or program are you attending?

B. Employment

I'd like to ask you about your work experience.

6. Are you currently working for pay?
7. [IF YES:] Tell me about your job.
 - What kind of work is it? What do you do there?
 - How do you like the work?
 - How long have you been working there?
 - How long have you been doing this type of work?
 - How did you find this job?
 - Do you have a regular work schedule or do your hours vary? [Probe for consistency of hours and schedule.]
 - About how much does it pay? [Probe: How much do you get paid by the hour?]
 - Does the job come with benefits like health insurance and paid sick leave?
 - Is this a job you could see yourself having for a long time? Is that your hope? Why (or why not)?
 - To what extent do you see this work leading to other job opportunities?

[INTERVIEWER: Repeat these questions if working multiple jobs.]
8. Are you currently working somewhere or taking care of someone *not* for pay? If so, tell me about that.

9. [IF NOT WORKING:] When was the last time you worked for pay?
 - What kind of work was it?
 - How did you find the job?
 - What did you like about that job? What didn't you like or found challenging?
 - Did the job come with benefits like health insurance and paid sick leave?
 - How long did you work there? What was your schedule like?
 - Why did you stop working at that job?
 - Would you like to be working or did you choose not to work right now? Why?
10. How many different jobs have you had in the past three years?
11. In thinking about the work you've done: What have you liked most? What have you liked least?
12. Some people have a hard time finding a job. What challenges have you faced when trying to find a job? [Probes: Did you have a hard time finding a job you're interested in? Having the right qualifications or skills for the job? Finding a job that fits with your family's schedule?]
13. [IF CURRENT/PRIOR EMPLOYMENT] What challenges have you faced in keeping your current job or past jobs? [Probe: Didn't have reliable transportation? Problems with child care? Had health issues? Had to take care of somebody with health issues?]
 - Can you tell me some of the reasons you left jobs in the past? [Probe: Had a better opportunity? Didn't have reliable transportation? Problems with child care? Had health issues?]
14. What are your current goals for your career? What type of job would you like to have in five years?
 - Have you had or expect to have any challenges in meeting your career goals? If yes, what are the challenges? How might you address these challenges?
15. Sometimes it is hard for people who have been in prison or jail to find work. Do you know people who have had this problem? Is it something you have experienced yourself? [If YES, proceed to next item.]
 - [IF NO, ASK:] Have you ever been convicted of a crime?
16. [IF YES HAVE BEEN INCARCERATED OR HAVE PRIOR CONVICTION:] How long were you in prison/jail?
 - In what ways has having a record affected your experiences with looking for and finding a job?
 - When were you released?
 - Are you still under any sort of community supervision like parole or probation?

C. Program experiences

Now I'd like to talk to you about your experiences with [the program].

17. Tell me how you got connected with [the program]. [Probe: How did you hear about it?]
 - What made you decide to show up to [the program]?
 - Are you required to participate in [the program]? By whom?
18. What do you hope to accomplish by participating in [the program]? Have you tried to accomplish this in the past? Tell me more about that.
19. What services are you receiving?
 - How do you decide which activities you will participate in?
 - How much say do you feel like you have in that decision?
20. Walk me through a typical day for you in [the program], beginning with how you get there.
 - Are all days during the week about the same in terms of [the program's] activities in which you participate, or do you do different activities on certain days?
 - If your activities change during the week, please describe a typical week.
21. What do you find most helpful during the [sessions, meetings, activities]? Tell me more about that.
22. How would you describe your relationship with program staff?
 - Who are the different types of people you interact with? Do you have a case manager?
 - What type of assistance does each person (role) provide? What is her/his role?
 - Are there different people you go to with different types of questions or issues? Please explain.
 - [IF HAVE CASE MANAGER ASK:] Tell me what happened the last time you met with your case manager. What types of questions or issues did you discuss? How typical was that experience?
 - How often do you meet with [each type of staff they identify]?
23. Do you usually set appointments or do you walk in? Do you ever call or text with staff about the program?
24. How many months have you been attending [the program]?
25. Do any of your family members—spouse/partner or children—participate in any services or activities of [the program]? Please describe for me what they do as part of the [the program].
26. In your own words, how would you describe [the program] to a friend, including what it's trying to help you with?

D. Linkages with/use of wraparound services

27. Finding child care is often a challenge for working families. Do you have a child care arrangement in place? Who looks after your children when you're at the program or work?

[Probe for informal or formal child care or preschool and probe for after-school for school-age children.]

[IF YES HAVE CHILD CARE:]

- Who provides child care and how often?
- Where are they located?
- Do you need to pay for your child care? Does that come out of your pocket, or does anyone help you pay?
- Do you have a backup plan if your main child care arrangement falls through?
- Have you ever had to find other care because your main child care arrangement fell through?
- How, if at all, has [the program] helped you with your current child care arrangement?

28. Does [the program] ever connect you with other types of services or supports that you and your family need? [Probe: This might be related to help with health issues, housing, transportation, food, or other issues.] If so, can you give me some examples?

- Please describe the role that program staff played in getting you connected to [service].
- Did you get help paying for [service] from the program?

29. Did you receive any of these supportive-type services without the program paying for them or referring you to them?

- If so, how did you learn about that/those service(s)?
- How did you find the provider/agency?

30. [UNLESS MENTIONED ABOVE:] Have you ever used child care providers or sent your children to preschool?

- How did you find the provider? Did you get any help in paying for this care or schooling?
- Was there anything you were required to do to get this help? [Probe: Sometimes people can only get help with child care if they attend a certain program, fill out certain forms, or if they can show they meet certain income requirements.]

E. Financial stability/support

Let's talk about your current financial situation.

31. In general, how would you describe your family's financial circumstances?

- Would you say that you have enough to make ends meet? What makes you say that?
- Would you describe your financial situation as stable right now? Why or why not?

32. What are some of the things you do to make ends meet?

- Do you have to make trade-offs or sacrifices to make ends meet?
- [IF YES:] What are some examples of those trade-offs or sacrifices?

33. In the past 3 months, have there been times when you couldn't pay your bills such as rent, electricity, gas, or phone?
- [IF YES:] What did you do in those situations?
34. In the past 3 months, have there been times when you and/or your children needed food but couldn't afford it?
- [IF YES:] What did you do in those situations?
35. Do you receive any help from family members? Friends? [Probe for whether it's financial or in kind.]
36. Do you receive any child support?
- [IF YES:] Do you get that on a regular basis or just off and on?
37. Do you receive any assistance from the government? For example, from:
- Food Stamps/SNAP
 - Disability checks such as SSI or SSDI
 - Cash assistance/TANF [or state's TANF program name]
 - Child care assistance
 - WIC
 - Housing assistance
 - Help with utilities
 - Other government benefits or assistance
38. Tell me about your health in general. How are you doing?
- Do you have any health issues that have made it difficult to find or keep work? To participate in training or school?
39. Have there been times you and/or your children needed help with a medical or health problem but couldn't afford it?

F. Perceptions and assessment of program

I'd like to get your overall impressions of [the program].

40. What has been most helpful to you about [the program]? Has it helped you advance your goals? If yes, please explain. If no, why not?
41. Is there anything about [the program] that was disappointing or not helpful? If yes, what was not helpful?
42. Is there anything about [the program] that you found difficult or challenging? If yes, what was difficult? [Probe: for example, meeting program requirements, getting support services]
43. Are you still participating?
- [IF NOT, ASK:] Why not?
 - [IF YES, ASK:] When do you expect to finish?

44. Have you ever been to a program like this before?

- If so, what was that program like for you?
- How does it compare with your experience with [the program]?

45. What do you expect you will do when you finish the program?

46. Do you have any suggestions for how [the program] could be better?

G. Conclusion

47. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me before we end? Is there anything that you think I've missed or that I should know?

Thank you for your time.