

**Attachment B:
Discussion Guide For TANF Staff**

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Introduction to Discussion Guides

Introduction: *We are from the research firm Abt Associates and we are conducting a study, “How TANF Agencies Support Families Experiencing Homelessness,” on behalf of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Abt is conducting a study about how TANF agencies are currently assisting their recipients in avoiding or exiting homelessness.*

As part of that study, we are talking with staff at [name of TANF program/agency] and others who work with TANF recipients to learn more about your approach in identifying and serving households experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. This could include the coordination of service provision between your TANF office and local homeless service providers or any approaches to integrating housing and employment interventions. Your participation in this study is important and will help us understand more about the services provided to TANF recipients to help them avoid or exit homelessness.

Before beginning our discussion, we want to thank you for agreeing to talk with us today. We know you are very busy during this time and will try to be as focused as possible. The interview will take about 90 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and there are no penalties for choosing not to take part in the interview. You can refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time. Our aim is to learn from your insights and experience, not to audit or judge your agency or programs. Your answers will be kept private to the extent permissible by law. However, because of the relatively small number of agencies participating in the study, there is a possibility that a response could be correctly attributed to you. Information you provide will not be shared with other staff at your program or agency. Only the study team will have access to the information you provide through this interview. Your name will not be listed in any published reports, and comments will not be attributed to you. Instead, your information will be combined with information provided by others.

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Do you have any questions before we begin?

Discussion Guide for TANF Staff

Background

Note: this guide will be used to interview many different types of staff at the TANF agency, including supervisors, counselors, and financial/eligibility workers. Where a particular question applies to just one category of staff, the relevant category is specified in italics before the question. Unless noted, the question should be asked of all types of staff.

1. What is your title and role at [name of TANF program/agency]?
2. How long have you been with [name of TANF program/agency]?
3. (*Counselors/Case Managers only*) What is your average caseload?

Program and Community Context

4. Can you provide an overview of the role of [name of TANF program/agency]? What range of services are provided?
5. (*Managers Only*) What is the general structure of the agency? [*Probe: who are the TANF service providers, how many staff work here, what are their roles? Is the program separate from or integrated with other human/workforce services departments?*] (*Note: If they have an organizational chart, ask to see it/take a copy with you*)
6. What are the demographics of your service area (e.g., race/ethnicity, immigrants)?
 - Have the demographics been consistent over time, or have they changed recently?
 - To what extent do your clients reflect the overall demographics of the area?
 - Do you work with specific subpopulations, such as veterans or victims of domestic violence? Do any staff carry specialized caseloads where they work with a specific subpopulation?
7. Please describe the economy in your service area. How has the economy in this area changed in the last five years or so? What businesses, if any, have opened or closed?
8. How has the local economy been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic downturn? Have the needs of the population changed? [*Probe: Which industries and occupations have been affected most? Are these occupations ones in which program participants are likely to be employed? What populations have been affected most? How specifically have the populations you serve been affected?*] [*Note: Ask during first interview at each provider – then adjust the question to say “We’ve heard that the economy in this area is {summarizing previous response}. Would you agree? If not, please describe.”*]

TANF Services

9. Please provide an overview of a family's progression through the TANF program, beginning with the initial application and eligibility determination through assignment to program activities and services. [*Note: Ask during first interview at each provider – then do not need to repeat*]
 - How are clients referred to the employment services provider after approval?
 - What are the goals/type/setting/structure of first meeting with the employment services provider (e.g., overview or orientation)?
 - When is the employment plan developed?
 - What staff is involved? Who does the customer talk to first, second, third? Who is their main point of contact?
 - To what extent has this process changed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

10. What assessments are completed to determine the needs and barriers of TANF recipients? At what point in the eligibility process (e.g., application, orientation, intake meeting, etc.)? [*Probe: any assessment for housing need? Is it included as part of TANF work activities?*]
 - How do you determine exemption from work requirements?

11. (*Caseworkers only*) What is your approach to case management of TANF recipients? [*Probe: how often do you meet with families? where do meetings occur (e.g., in person, over the phone)? How do you monitor compliance with the employment plan?*]

12. To what extent have you made changes to case management in response to the COVID-19 pandemic? [*Probe: changes to case management approach, determining eligibility, recertification processes?*]

13. (*Financial/Eligibility Workers and Caseworkers*) How often do customers have to recertify?

14. We're interested in better understanding the different types of services provided through TANF. Can you please describe the range of services available to TANF recipients? Have the available services changed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

15. What partner organizations do you refer a family to if they are experiencing homelessness or housing instability? What types of services do they provide?
 - How do you coordinate with these service providers (i.e., process for eligibility determination, referral, ongoing coordination and management)? How does it vary by provider?
 - To what extent are needed services available to help customers obtain and retain employment and housing? What gaps exist?

- Have you engaged any new partner organizations to meet additional needs during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Services for Homeless Families

16. Different federal agencies use different definitions of homelessness. Can you explain what definition of homelessness is used to determine a household's eligibility to receive housing assistance services? [*Probe: does the program serve households who are precariously housed or doubled up, or only literally homeless – families in emergency shelter or unsheltered?*]
17. What information do you collect from TANF recipients to determine need and eligibility specifically for housing assistance? [*Probe: housing status and housing assessment questions*]
 - Is this related to the local CoC's coordinated entry processes? [*Note: If necessary, explain coordinated entry is process developed to assist CoCs in quickly and fairly identifying, assessing, referring and connecting people experiencing homelessness to housing and other assistance.*]
18. What types of housing assistance services does your state or local government, or public housing agency (PHA) provide under the TANF program? Under emergency assistance/diversion assistance (if relevant)? (*Probe: short-term rental or mortgage assistance, emergency assistance, diversion assistance, security and utility payments, moving assistance, motel and hotel vouchers (emergency shelter), case management services, financial and credit counseling, legal services, housing search and placement services, administrative costs associated with these activities*).
 - For each of the housing services you mentioned:
 - What are the eligibility criteria?
 - Who provides the service?
 - Does the TANF program pay for the service, or just provide the referral?
 - *If the partner organization provides service:*
 - How do you coordinate with these service providers (i.e., process for eligibility determination, referral, ongoing coordination and management)? How does it vary by provider?
 - Are there any shared staffing processes or co-located staff? If so, is the staff located at the TANF office? Are there any services now being provided remotely because of the need for social distancing?
 - Ongoing coordination or management?
 - What was the process for identifying partner organizations?

19. Do you refer families to partner agencies if they are experiencing homelessness or housing instability? What types of (non-TANF) services do they provide?
20. What is the referral process for connecting recipients that need housing assistance with other service providers? *[Probe: phone call, email, shared forms, single worker, Online Work Readiness Tool (OWRA)]* Have any of these functions been performed remotely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
21. *(Managers only)* How did your TANF program decide which housing services to offer? Do individual offices make connections to local providers or is it a more centralized process?
 - Are any of these services combined together with *[Name of CoC]*-funded services, such as rental assistance?
22. What staff members take the lead in providing housing assistance? *[Probe: TANF caseworkers or staff at homelessness program]*
 - Do TANF staff coordinate with the homelessness program staff after initial referral? In what way?
 - Has there been any change in these roles since the service model began?
23. What is the length of assistance for TANF-funded housing services? Once TANF benefits are exhausted or the family's time limit for assistance is reached, do TANF caseworkers coordinate with homeless assistance providers to ensure continued housing assistance if needed? Have you already or do you anticipate changing the length of assistance for TANF-funded housing assistance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
24. What happens if a TANF recipient stops meeting requirements/is non-compliant or sanctioned? How does that affect the housing services? *[Probe: changes to sanctions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?]*
25. Do you collect any data on outcome measures for TANF recipients related to homelessness (e.g., the number of households that are able to exit homelessness through the program)? *[Probe: does the program report into Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) or any other data reporting system to track housing status? How frequently does the data get updated?]*

Design and Implementation Plans for Addressing Family Homelessness

26. *(Managers only)* Why did your TANF agency decide to begin helping TANF recipients with housing assistance? What factors influenced this decision? *[Probe: Did your state make changes in its approach to serving families experiencing homelessness in response to the guidance provided in the TANF Information Memorandum TANF-ACF-IM-2013-01: "USE OF TANF FUNDS TO SERVE HOMELESS FAMILIES AND FAMILIES AT RISK OF EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS" ?]*

27. How have these services and/or partnerships changed in the last few years?
28. Moving forward, are there any plans to change the process for providing services or the types of services offered?

Perceived Benefits and Challenges of Approach

29. Do you think the partnership between [*name of TANF program/agency*] and [*name of homelessness program(s)*] is benefitting TANF recipients (e.g., able to help families get and stay housed)? In what ways? Why/why not?
30. What would you change about your partnership with [*name of homelessness program(s)*]? [*Probe: adequate communication between TANF office staff and homeless program staff; any duplication of services or case management*]. What is working well? Why?
31. What would you tell someone else who is trying to implement this approach in another location? What would you recommend? What would you change? [*Probe: different partnership structure; more or less staff; need additional services; training*]