

**Descriptive Study of County- versus State-  
Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy  
Families (TANF) Programs**

**OMB Information Collection Request  
New Collection**

**Supporting Statement**

**Part B**

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## **B1. Respondent Universe and Sampling Methods**

### ***Respondent Universe***

The universe for the qualitative, site-visit component of the study programs consists of eight county-administered TANF programs consistently reported as such: California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Ohio. States that have somewhat hybrid approaches and that may or may not self-identify as having county-administered programs were excluded from the universe for the site visits, in order to better address the key study purpose of describing what county-administered programs look like and identifying the technical assistance needs of county-administered programs. There is already sufficient complexity and diversity of states operating under a self-identified, county-administered system that adding additional complexity by including states that have hybrid county/state administration approaches would make it harder to distinguish the unique characteristics of county-administered programs.

To examine the degree and dimensions of variation within and across states with county-administered TANF programs, and to identify characteristics that apply generally to both administrative approaches, it is important to include a second, broader universe of state-administered TANF programs, county/state hybrid programs, and those county-administered programs not selected for site visits. This second universe will consist of 43 state TANF programs, that is, 51 TANF programs, excluding the eight states with county-administered programs.

### ***Purposive Sample Selection***

From the main universe of eight county-administered TANF programs, six will be selected for case studies. The six programs will be selected to ensure that they allow the study team to develop a systematic description of county-administered systems, identify areas of difference between county- and state-administered systems, and identify specific technical assistance needs of county-administered systems. Because the number of county-administered states exceeds the number of study sites and the level of resources available to the study, it is not possible to visit all of the county-administered states. Thus, site selection will be purposive with the goal of selecting for the study TANF programs that will provide as much diversity as possible while also providing information that is relevant and applicable elsewhere.

Working in collaboration with ACF, the study team developed the following six criteria to be used in selecting the sample of six programs, as follows, roughly organized in order of importance:

1. willingness to participate in the study;
2. actively seeking to address technical assistance and operations issues;
3. state focus on improving performance management;
4. maximum share of TANF caseload;
5. diversity in county governance forms; and
6. diversity of caseload and other program characteristics.

The selection criteria will be placed in a matrix with the eight potential self-identified, county-administered programs. The study team will fill in the matrix based on the information obtained from program-related documents and secondary data. Site selection will be iterative because the advantages and disadvantages of each site must be determined in relation to other potential selections to generate one or more balanced samples. These criteria are expected to yield a diverse set of states that comprise a large share of TANF caseload and illustrate useful information for identifying TA needs.

Additionally, two counties within each site will be selected for visits. Because it is not practical to select a random sample representative of hundreds of counties operating in the selected states, county site selection will be purposive with the goal to include counties that best represent the most common experiences and characteristics of county-administered TANF programs. With guidance from ACF, the study team has developed additional criteria for selecting the individual counties to visit for each study site in lieu of the project team relying on state program officials independently developing a list of prospective counties. The criteria include:

1. maximum share of TANF caseload;
2. TANF program activity level;
3. diversity in size of population served;
4. range of TANF approaches;
5. proximity to other prospective counties (i.e. two counties within a three-hour drive of each other); and
6. diversity among other characteristics (e.g. seeking technical assistance, focus on TANF performance management, caseload and program characteristics).

The county selection criteria will be applied using an iterative process similar to the process for state selection.

From the second universe (all TANF programs that are not county-administered) directors from selected programs will be invited to participate in a telephone interview. The study team has identified a maximum of 30 states to take part in the phone interviews because it is not possible to call all of the non-county-administered states with available resources. Thus, selection will be purposive with the goal of yielding results as objective as possible to permit valid conclusions. The study team developed the following criteria for selecting the individual states to participate in the telephone interviews:

1. maximum share of TANF caseload;
2. diversity in caseload and other program characteristics.

Similar to the selection process for the county-administered states and counties within those states, selection for the telephone interviews will also be an iterative process.

## **B2. Procedures for Collection of Information**

This section describes the plan for collecting qualitative data through telephone interviews and in-person interviews with staff in county and state TANF Programs. In-person interviews will be conducted in each of the six states selected from the universe of county-administered TANF programs and from two counties within each state. Telephone interviews will be conducted with TANF directors in states that are not county-administered and choose to participate.

**Informed Consent.** Verbal consent will be requested from participants. See each instrument for the verbal informed consent language that will be used in the interviews and the interview guides.

**Site Visits.** When an initial likely sample of 6 county-administered TANF programs has been identified, the study team will contact the TANF director in each of the preliminarily-selected states to confirm the information on which the selection was based and to confirm their willingness to participate in the study (See Appendix A-8). After this initial contact, site visit planning will include several steps:

- Contact the designated state and county staff to identify potential dates for the visit and discussion participants.
- Arrange staff travel and accommodations.
- Finalize the agenda at least one week before the meeting time.
- Conduct the site visit.
- Follow up with “thank you” letters to people who gave their time to participate in the interviews (See Appendix A-9).

The fieldwork component will include two- or three-day visits to six states, with each site visit generally including visits to two counties in each site. The primary mode of data and information collection will be a series of semi-structured interviews. These interviews will be conducted with state TANF administrators or program managers (Appendix A-1), state human service department directors or cabinet-level officials (Appendix A-2), county TANF administrators (Appendix A-3), county executive or board members (Appendix A-4), and/or county TANF director’s associations or similar organizations (Appendix A-5).

Each site will be visited by a 2 or 3-person team, including at least one senior and one junior level staff. The contractor plans to have all site visitors present at each interview whenever possible. The senior staff will lead the interviews. The junior staff will assist with documentation and data collection, ensuring that all topics and subtopics are covered. This approach assures more thorough interviews and notes, allowing one interviewer to pursue additional clarification and follow-up questions while the other is taking notes. Having at least two people listening and recalling the interview is helpful in analysis and interpretation as well. If deemed appropriate, the interviews will be recorded for possible transcription of key quotes or other details.

**Telephone Interviews.** Prior to each telephone interview with a state TANF director, the following steps will be undertaken. An initial e-mail to each state TANF director will be made to determine interest and availability for participation in the study. The initial e-mail will introduce the purpose of the telephone interview, length of the call and specific information about the topics to be covered during the interview. This e-mail will establish a contact person from the

interview team for each director and also provide information about potential available dates for scheduling the calls. (See Appendix A-7)

Each telephone interview will be assigned a team member responsible for facilitating the call, a note taker responsible for capturing responses, and if deemed appropriate, the calls will be recorded for possible transcription. Each call will last approximately 30 minutes and use a structured interview guide (Appendix A-6). The guide is designed to minimize response time and maximize consistency across interviews, but will allow the respondents to elaborate on their answers as needed. Depending on the timing of approval, calls could occur before or after the site visits.

**Quantitative Data Collection Methods.** The contractor will gather quantitative data available from the Welfare Rules Database and publicly available data from ACF. Publicly available data from ACF provide a wealth of information on state TANF programs and TANF recipients, through state reports, and reported aggregates of microdata (e.g., Annual Reports to Congress). The Welfare Rules Database, funded by HHS and maintained by the Urban Institute, is a comprehensive source of information on AFDC/TANF policies and program rules in effect in every state and the District of Columbia since 1996; it includes not only the standard rules in effect in each state but also variations in the rules within states. A correlation matrix will be used to identify differences in state contexts, program implementation, and client outcomes. This analysis will help illuminate whether there are observable differences between the two types of administration generally.

### **B3. Methods to Maximize Response Rates and Deal with Nonresponse**

Willingness to participate in the study will be one of the criteria used in selecting the six states in the sample. All states selected for the site visits are expected to participate. High participation (80 percent or more) is expected among the state officials within states that have agreed to participate. Within each state, two counties will be invited to participate. Again willingness to participate will be one of the criteria for response, and so all selected counties are expected to participate and high participation (80 percent or more) is expected among the various county officials.

Once state and county sites are selected, the study team will take a number of steps to minimize the burden to the interview respondents and maximize response rates. First, the site visits will be scheduled in a manner that allows respondents to identify the most convenient time for the interview or visit within the study timeframe. Second, flexibility will be exercised in adjusting the specific order, timing, and location of the on-site interviews to meet the respondents' needs.

For the telephone interviews of TANF directors in state-administered programs, a moderate response rate of about 50-75 percent is expected. Past experiences with state TANF directors have yielded high participation (over 90 percent), but a lower response rate is expected for the current study. Because the current study focuses primarily on county-administered programs, state TANF directors in state-administered programs may feel they have less to gain from having their experiences and perspectives included in the study. The study team will take a number of steps to minimize the burden and maximize the response rates of the TANF directors in state-administered programs. First, the introductory e-mail will encourage their participation by explaining the value of the study and including specific information on the content of the interview questions. Second, the interview guide is structured to allow closed-ended responses that minimize response time. Further, respondents will be able to schedule the telephone interviews at a time most convenient for them within the study timeframe. Nonetheless, because the purpose of the telephone interviews is to provide a broad comparison to the county-administered states, a lower response rate will provide sufficient information for the study purposes.

#### **B4. Tests of Procedures or Methods to be Undertaken**

Due to the limited nature of the respondent universe, eight county TANF programs for a selection of six, it would not be practical to pretest interview guides with county TANF programs. The study team pre-tested the structured telephone interview guide with TANF directors in two state-administered programs and revised the interview guides in response to their comments.

#### **B5. Individual Consulted on Statistical Aspects and Individuals Collecting and/or Analyzing Data**

The information for this study is being collected by the Urban Institute and its subcontractor ICF International on behalf of ACF. The following project staff played a lead role in developing the study design plan and data collection protocols:

- *Heather Hahn, Principal Investigator and Co-Lead on Study Design/Measurement, Urban Institute*
- *Yvette Lamb, Co-Lead on Study Design/Measurement, ICF International*
- *Jeanette Hercik, Technical Advisor on Study Design/Measurement, ICF International*

This leadership team brings extensive experience designing and implementing complex, mixed-methods research studies, expert knowledge of TANF programs, and extensive field and survey research experience and training, including overall design, instrument design, survey and qualitative interviewing, and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Dr. Hahn will oversee collection and analysis of data gathered through on-site interviews and telephone interviews.

The agency responsible for receiving and approving contract deliverables is:

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for  
Children and Families (ACF)  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

The Federal project officer for this project is Michael Dubinsky.