

**STATE TANF DIRECTORS
INTERVIEW GUIDE**

[Note: This guide is intended for respondents identified as State TANF Directors in County Administered/State Supervised states. Respondents will be familiar with the issues, complexities, and realities of County administered TANF programs.]

Date of Interview:
Interviewer (s):
State:
Respondent Name:
Title:
Respondent Affiliation:
E-Mail:
Phone:
Address:
Fax:

Introduction/Purpose of the Study

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today.

My name is _____ and I'm a researcher from the [Urban Institute, a non-profit research organization OR ICF International, a consulting firm] located in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. With me today is [name and affiliation].

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (ACF/OPRE) is conducting a study of county-administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs. The study is not an audit or evaluation of any single program. Rather, the purpose of this study is to provide information about the way the program works; for example, we want to learn:

- What do county-administered TANF programs look like;
- How do county-administered TANF programs differ from state-administered TANF programs in terms of program implementation, operations, outputs, and outcomes; and
- Do county-administered TANF programs have unique technical assistance needs?

A Descriptive Study of County versus State Administered TANF Programs

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Privacy Statement *[Interviewer must read this]:*

This data collection effort is intended for the purpose of describing county-administered TANF programs' operations and needs, and comparing these with state-administered TANF programs. We will use what we learn today and from other interviews to contribute to a report to HHS and others interested in TANF programs. Our study began in October 2012 and will end in September 2014. Your participation is voluntary and your statements are private to the extent permitted by law. This interview is not part of an audit or a compliance review. Your comments will not affect the program's management or your involvement with the program.

We know that you are busy and will try to be as brief as possible. We have many questions and are going to talk to many different people, so please do not feel as though we expect you to be able to answer every question. Again, this interview is **not** part of an audit or a compliance review. We are interested in learning about your ideas, experiences, and opinions about TANF program administration. There are no right or wrong answers. We want to know what you think. If there are any questions you do not wish to answer, just let us know.

In addition, before we start, I want to let you know that although we will take notes during these interviews, information is never associated with your name or the name of any respondent in any report, discussions with supervisors or colleagues, or ACF/OPRE. When we write our reports and discuss the study findings, information from all informants is compiled and presented so that no one person is identified. However, although individuals will not be cited as sources, information will be presented in our reports that may enable a user to infer the identity of the information source.

[IF WE WOULD LIKE TO RECORD THIS SESSION:] We value the information you will share with us today and want to make sure we capture all of it. So, with your permission, we will be recording the session and/or [name of person] will be taking notes on a laptop computer. However, we will destroy the recordings as soon as we have made complete notes of the meeting. Do you have an objection for us to proceed with recording?

We have scheduled this meeting for 60 minutes. Is that still convenient? (If yes) Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Do you have any questions before we begin? If you have any questions during the interview, please do not hesitate to ask-- if something is not clear, just let me know. Okay?

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[NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: The respondent's answers to individual questions may address subsequent questions. Subsequent questions may be skipped or probed as needed to gather complete information.]

I. Background and Context

1. Please describe your position/role in the state of _____.

(Probe: What is your job title? What are your responsibilities related to TANF? What are your overall responsibilities? How long have you held this role? In the past, did you have other positions in this department?)
2. We'll be getting into specifics shortly, but first I wanted to ask in your view, what are the benefits of managing TANF in a county-administered system?
 - a. (Possible responses: reductions in regulations and federal oversight; ability to redesign welfare programs in more efficient/effective ways; counties are closer to the problems of residents; additional flexibility for service delivery; greater familiarity with capacity of local programs to serve those in need; more responsive to changing demographic trends; increased ability to innovate)
3. Conversely, are there any obstacles in your view to operating in a county-administered system? What about this arrangement is more challenging?

II. History of TANF Program Administration

I would like to ask some questions about the history of TANF program administration in your state.

1. From what you know, what was the historical role of county offices in providing welfare services?

[NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: Probe, as needed: Is relationship a **continuation of administrative practices** prior to the implementation of PRWORA (i.e., AFDC)? Have there been **changes over time in the relationship**? Are relationships **clearly defined and outlined**, by state policies/procedures? How **autonomous** are county offices?]
2. Did the state have approved federal waivers to administer a more localized AFDC program? Can you describe some of the specific responsibilities of the county or local governing board during AFDC?

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3. What, to the extent of your knowledge, were some of the major reasons why the state placed more functional and administrative responsibilities with the counties in the wake of PRWORA rather than maintain more state-level control?

[NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: These reasons can be probed if the respondent has long term involvement with decisions regarding administering and implementing TANF:

- a. Reductions in regulations and federal government oversight
- b. Ability to redesign welfare programs in more efficient and effective ways
- c. Perception that counties are closer to the problems of residents
- d. Provide additional flexibility for services and service delivery
- e. Greater familiarity with capacity of local programs to serve those in need
- f. More responsive to changing demographic trends
- g. Increase ability at local level to innovate
- h. Greater capacity to engender public support for welfare reform

III. Financial Management and Fiscal Reporting

I would like to focus now on financial management and fiscal reporting responsibilities for your County administered TANF program.

1. First, could you explain broadly how your TANF program is financed, including federal TANF dollars, state dollars and county dollars? [NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: The respondent's answer may address subsequent questions in this section. Subsequent questions may be skipped or probed, as needed to gather complete information.]
2. The TANF block grant to the state has remained consistent over the last 15 plus years. What has been the experience on the state level—have funds allocated to the counties remained consistent with the 1997 levels?
3. How are funds allocated to the counties?
 - a. Are the funding mechanisms different for administrative dollars and program dollars? If so, please explain how each type of funding is allocated to the counties.

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- b. Does the state allocation of program or administrative funds vary year to year? Month to month?
 - c. Are adjustments program funds based on the number of families served?
 - d. Has there been any adjustment in county program or administrative funding levels due to the economic recession or state budget issues?
 - e. Is funding tied to performance? If so, how?
 - f. What role does a county board of supervisors have in TANF funding and other financial decisions?
4. Does the State have a standard reporting process and protocol for counties to report expenditures—both cash and non-cash assistance?
 - a. How does that system work? How is the back and forth between the State and Counties handled?
 - b. How often is data collected—monthly, less frequently, more frequently?
 - c. Has the State established reporting metrics (e.g., expenditures per participant) for the counties?
 - d. What communication vehicles are used between the state and counties? For example, is there a monthly newsletter or funding notification provided to the counties to keep them informed of changes in procedures?
5. There is a Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirement for the drawdown of Federal TANF funds. Can you tell me a little about how that works in your State in relationship to the Counties?
 - a. Is the MOE requirement met only by the state or is it passed down to the county level, requiring counties to meet MOE requirements?
6. Is there a set proportion of the federal funds that are reserved by the State for their use in administrative oversight, monitoring and reporting?
7. Does your state have a Solely State-Funded program(s) related to your TANF program? If so, are State dollars allocated to the counties for these programs?
 - a. If so, how are these State dollars allocated to the counties (e.g. by caseload)?

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- b. Is there a County match requirement for these programs? If so, what is the source for these funds?
8. What is the level of discretion that the State has in creating state-wide initiatives that are funded from Federal TANF resources?
9. When funds are used for TANF purposes 3 and 4 (reducing nonmarital childbearing and promoting two-parent families) are those allocation decisions made only at state level or also at the county level?
10. When funds are transferred to other programs, are those allocations decisions made only at the state level or also at the county level?
11. Does the state mandate to the counties any State-specific programming and set-aside allocation of funding for specific programs?
12. From your state perspective, have there been any challenges with the cost of administering TANF at the county level, especially during the economic crisis?
13. What technical assistance is needed regarding financing and fiscal reporting for county-administered TANF programs?

IV. State - County Bureaucratic Structure and Communication

*Now I would like to get a general understanding of the **current relationship between the state government and county governments** in the administration of TANF, before we delve into the specifics.*

1. Can you please give us a broad overview of how the state/county relationship is currently structured in your state with regard to TANF? From your perspective, how has this relationship changed over the 15 year implementation of PRWORA?
2. What are the general responsibilities of each level of government for managing and implementing TANF programs? (Potential areas: financial management, policy, administrative responsibilities, performance measurement, staff hiring, contracting for services)
 - a. State responsibilities?
 - b. County responsibilities?

(Probe: Who, what position or governmental entity, is the point of contact for county responsibilities?)

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3. We are interested in how these responsibilities are governed and where these entities derive their authority/responsibility. To what extent are responsibilities governed by:
 - a. Federal policy?
 - b. State legislative mandate?
 - c. County rules/regulations?
 - d. Are there other governing authorities or mandates (e.g., court orders) ?
4. Is there a need for technical assistance to facilitate these relationships and/or communication? If so, please describe.

V. Policy Development

As we delve into more specifics, I would like to focus first on the roles of the state and counties in TANF policy development.

1. What policy decisions relating to TANF implementation are made at the state level and which are made at the county level?
 - a. Determining eligibility requirements
 - b. Determining asset and earned income disregards
 - c. Setting benefit levels
 - d. Determining appropriate work requirements
 - e. Determining recipient sanctioning procedures and processes
 - f. Determining time limits
 - g. Establishing family caps
 - h. Determining child support pass-through
2. To what extent have counties' policy choices and priorities varied across the state?
 - a. What influence do local constituencies, socioeconomic factors, metropolitan status, region, population changes, budgetary situations, demographics play on policy variations across the state?

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3. How are TANF policy decisions communicated up and down the bureaucracy? In other words, how does the state communicate policy decisions to the counties and how do counties communicate policy decisions to the state? How does each entity communicate policy decisions to other stakeholders?
 - a. Policy memos or summaries? Policy manuals or directives? Legislative concept proposals and memos? Committee reports or memos? Public speeches or public testimonies? Electronic mail or electronic bulletin boards? Executive or legislative briefings? Functional documents that require independent review, as opposed to proactive engagement, e.g., legislation, regulations, procedures, or agreements? Regular data reports (e.g. hard copies or output to a data dashboard structure)?
 - b. Is there a single point of contact for communication surrounding policy?
4. At what level can decisions about privatization of services be made—state or county?
 - a. Do counties have flexibility to create performance benchmarks and performance contracts for privatized services?

VI. IT and other resources available to counties

I would like to focus now on your technology systems and resources.

1. To what extent do counties share IT systems throughout the state? Are the systems statewide, or unique in each county, or used by subgroups of counties?
 - a. How are shared systems managed (mainframe, web-based)?
 - b. Is the system TANF only or connected with other programs (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, Child Care)?
2. To what extent do counties share data systems throughout the state? Are the data systems statewide, or unique in each county, or used by subgroups of counties?
 - a. How are shared data systems managed (mainframe, web-based)?
 - b. Is the data system TANF only or connected with other programs (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, Child Care)?
3. What IT technical assistance or support is available to counties from the state?

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- a. How often are these resources accessed? What works well in the system? What is challenging? What do you wish was different about the process?
4. From your perspective, do counties collaborate to stretch resources further?
 - a. Is it a formalized or ad hoc process? What mechanisms exist for initiating or responding to a request? Is this data tracked?
5. What technical assistance needs exist at the state or county level with respect to support to mitigate challenges or problem-solving for IT solutions and more effective data management?

VII. Program Oversight and Monitoring

I would like to focus now on the program oversight and monitoring practices of your TANF program.

1. What performance monitoring systems are used by the state to oversee TANF?
2. What performance measures have been put into place?
3. How is program compliance ensured?
 - a. What metrics are in place to ensure county compliance? How are those data collected? How is program quality defined and measured?
 - b. What state supports are available to counties? How are errors addressed? What types of corrective action are used?
4. How does the state monitor participation in work activities?
 - a. What happens in your State when a county does not meet its work participation rate?
 - b. [For states that use performance measures beyond the WPR] Do counties monitor, or are counties held accountable, for any other measures beyond the WPR?
5. If the Federal government levies a penalty against the State, how does that penalty flow down to counties?
 - a. Do responsible counties bear the entire penalty? How are those funds realized? What steps are taken to mitigate future errors?

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6. From your perspective, what tools or resources would support improved performance for county-administered TANF programs?
 - a. What TA efforts have been implemented in the past? What were the results? What were the lessons learned?

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VIII. Service Delivery and Staffing

I would like to focus now on the service delivery practices of your program.

1. To what extent is there variation in the implementation of TANF services to clients across the state:
 - a. In-take and access (i.e., same screening and assessment tool for determining eligibility? Making referrals? Program and service eligibility?)
 - b. Service delivery (i.e., referral mechanisms and co-location of staff, on-site supports, job support service referrals, employment supports like child care referrals and transportation vouchers)
 - c. Work supports (i.e., job club, job readiness training, components of work support)
 - i. What is the level of flexibility at the county level to define and implement work support programs
 - d. Staffing and salaries (i.e., job descriptions and requirements, salary levels, training)
 - i. What discretion do counties have in making staffing and caseload decisions?
 - ii. How are caseload levels (staff: case ratios) determined?
 1. State directed?
 2. County directed?
 - iii. Are qualifications and job descriptions determined at the state or county level?
 - iv. Are hiring decisions made at the state or county level?
 - v. Are salaries set at the state or county level?
 - e. Generalist versus Specialist Worker (i.e., universal worker, TANF only, Medicaid only, SNAP only)

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2. To what extent are service integration and cooperation between TANF and other work support programs (SNAP, child care, DOL-sponsored training) standardized across the state or unique to each county?
3. How seamless is the transition for families needing services as they move from one county to another? For example, does a family's case close, requiring them to reapply in their new county, or are cases transferred between counties?
4. From your perspective, what is the role of the state in ensuring effective case management of TANF families?
5. What technical assistance is needed to improve service delivery for TANF programs?
 - a. On-boarding materials?
 - b. Training tools?
 - c. Recruitment strategies?
 - d. Retention strategies?
 - e. Effective screening and assessment protocols?

IX. Other variation or technical assistance needs

1. Are there **any other differences** in how TANF programs are implemented **from county to county** that we haven't already discussed?
2. We have asked about specific technical assistance and support during this discussion. Are there **any other types of technical assistance** that that would benefit your program?
 - a. (Recount earlier examples, probe for each area: Communication, policy, IT, monitoring, service delivery, OTHER?)

Thank you so much for sharing this information with us. This has been a great discussion and we are grateful for your time. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your program?

If we have any follow-up questions as we write our report, may we contact you again?

Thank you.

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