

**STATE HUMAN SERVICE COMMISSIONERS AND CABINET OFFICIALS
INTERVIEW GUIDE**

[Note: This guide is intended for respondents identified as State Human Service Commissioners or Cabinet Officials 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

Guide for Interviews with State Human Service Commissioners or Cabinet Officials

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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. In your position as [JOB TITLE (Human Services Commissioner/Cabinet Officer)] what are your overall responsibilities related to TANF?
2. How does the position of the State TANF Director relate to you?
3. What, if any, role do you play in setting TANF policy and implementation, and establishing TANF monitoring and program requirements?
4. 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)
5. 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 in your state?

[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?]

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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?
2. 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?
3. What is the level of discretion that the State has in creating state-wide initiatives that are funded from Federal TANF resources?
4. 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?
5. When funds are transferred to other programs, are those allocations decisions made only at the state level or also at the county level?

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. We are interested in how these responsibilities are governed and where these entities derive their authority/responsibility. Which responsibilities are governed by:
 - a. Federal policy?
 - b. State legislative mandate?
 - c. County rules/regulations?

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- d. Are there other governing authorities or mandates (e.g., court orders)?

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. 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? Other mechanisms?

VI. IT and other resources available to counties

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

1. Do you know if data and IT systems are shared across various programs, for example, TANF, SNAP, Medicaid?
2. Do you anticipate that resources from the Affordable Care Act will be used in your state to enhance the technology infrastructure available to TANF offices?

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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. 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?

VIII. Service Delivery and Staffing

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

1. From your perspective, what is the role of the state in ensuring effective case management of TANF families?

IX. Variation across state

1. From your perspective, are there any other differences in how TANF programs are implemented from county to county in your state that we haven't already discussed?

X. Technical Assistance

1. Are there any other types of technical assistance that you would recommend at the state and county levels to improve practice and program improvements?

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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