

**COUNTY TANF DIRECTOR'S ASSOCIATION
INTERVIEW GUIDE**

[Note: This guide is intended for respondents identified as with a state's County TANF Director's Association or similar organization. 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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APPENDIX A-5

We will be writing a report summarizing what we learn in the study. This report will be designed to help policymakers and others understand more fully the issues, complexities, and realities of county-administered TANF programs. The study will be completed by the summer of 2014

Privacy Statement *[Interviewer must read this]:*

Before beginning the interview, I (we) want to remind you that your participation is voluntary. I (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 county Administered TANF programs. There are no right or wrong answers. We want to know what you think.

This data collection effort is intended for the purpose of describing how County Administered TANF programs are operating, and what, if any, variation exists across these 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.

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?

Finally, we want to make sure that your participation is entirely voluntary. If there are any questions you do not wish to answer, just let us know.

We have scheduled this meeting for 90 minutes. Is that still convenient? (If yes) Are you willing to participate in this interview?

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APPENDIX A-5

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?

[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. Organizational Background/Context

1. Please describe your position/role. (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)
2. Briefly, could you describe the history of your organization and its role statewide on TANF?
3. 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)
4. Conversely, what are some of the obstacles counties have voiced to operating in a county-administered system? What about this arrangement is more challenging?

II. History of TANF Program Administration

I would like to focus now on the history of TANF program administration in counties across the state.

1. What has been the historical role of county programs and administrators in the provision of welfare services?
2. What is the historical relationship between the state government and county governments in the administration of human service programs?
3. Is there a statutory or written framework under which counties operate, or is there more of an informal understanding of responsibilities?

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APPENDIX A-5

4. Has there been any change to the role that counties have played in the state's public social services system? (For example, has there been a shift to devolving responsibility for program administration in recent years?)

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APPENDIX A-5

III. 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. Please describe as an overview how the state’s relationship with the counties is structured with regard to TANF?
2. What are the general responsibilities of counties for managing and implementing TANF programs? (Potential areas: Financial management, policy, administrative responsibilities, performance measurement, staff hiring, contracting for services)
 - a. Of these, do most counties grant specific responsibilities to county boards or other executive management? [If so, which responsibilities?]
 - b. And are specific responsibilities typically assigned to agency or department-level staff? [If so, which responsibilities?]
3. How is information communicated between state and county entities?
 - a. Generally, who is responsible for managing communication?
 - b. Is there any pattern or trends in how communication occurs (meetings, written memoranda, other vehicles)? Frequency?
 - c. Patterns/trends across counties in formal or informal reporting functions?
 - d. To whom does each county’s chief executive typically communicate with on human-service related issues?
4. What types of technical assistance needs have county directors expressed to facilitate these relationships and/or communication?

IV. 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 on TANF implementation are made at the county level? (Probe/for example: eligibility requirements, earned income disregards, benefit levels, work requirements, sanction procedures, time limits, family cap policy)

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APPENDIX A-5

2. In what policy areas do counties typically have the greatest degree of autonomy to set programmatic rules?
3. How are policy decisions typically made at the county level?
4. To what extent have counties' policy choices varied across the state?
 - a. What influence do local constituencies, socioeconomic factors, metropolitan status, region, population changes, budgetary situations, and demographics play on policy choices for counties?
5. At the county level, what role does the county [BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OR EXECUTIVE] play, as opposed to county administrators/bureaucrats, such as the county TANF director or a department administrator? (Probe: funding decisions as well as policy)
6. 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)?

V. Program Oversight and Monitoring

I would like to focus now on the program oversight and monitoring practices of county programs.

1. What monitoring systems or performance measures are used by counties to oversee TANF?
2. Are all of these systems or measures required by the state, or have any been enacted from the local level?
3. How is program compliance ensured?

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APPENDIX A-5

- a. What metrics are in place to ensure county compliance? How are those data collected?
 - b. What supports are available to counties? How are errors addressed? What types of corrective action or monitoring processes are used?
 - c. What are the human and IT systems involved?
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 infracting counties bear the entire penalty? How are those funds realized? What steps are taken to mitigate future below-target performance?
6. What tools or resources would support improved performance for county-administered TANF programs? (Probe: What TA efforts have been implemented in the past? What were the results? How could those results be improved?)

VI. Financial Management and Fiscal Reporting

I would like to focus now on financial management and fiscal reporting responsibilities for county administered TANF programs.

1. How are TANF funds allocated to counties?
 - a. How has the allocation of TANF funds across counties changed since 1997?
 - b. Are funds allocated based on caseload levels or total county population? Some other measure? Are program funds adjusted for changes in the number of families served?
 - c. Is funding tied to performance? If so, how?

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APPENDIX A-5

2. What role does the county board of supervisors have in TANF funding and other decisions?
3. What technical assistance is needed regarding financing and fiscal reporting for county-administered TANF programs? Would it be helpful to see profiles from other County Administered systems?

VII. IT and other resources available to counties

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

1. To what extent do counties share IT systems and data throughout the state? Are the systems and data statewide, unique in each county, or used by subgroups of counties?
 - a. How are shared systems managed (mainframe, web-based)? [if some systems are shared and others are unique, probe about integrating unique systems with the shared data]
 - b. Are most counties able to directly run data reports, or do requests need to be routed elsewhere?
2. What support – such as TA or emergency response – is available to counties? How are these accessed?
 - 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?
3. 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?
4. What TA needs exist for the state or counties with respect to support to mitigate challenges or problem-solve?
 - a. What support would be helpful? How could the process be streamlined?

VIII. Service Delivery and Staffing

I would like to focus now on the service delivery practices of county programs.

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APPENDIX A-5

1. 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? (Probe: related to policy, staffing, and IT)
2. To what extent is there variation across counties in clients' interactions with TANF, in terms of program access, service delivery mechanisms, work activities, etc?
 - a. How do clients in most counties interact with caseworkers?
 - b. What engagement programs and referral processes do counties use?
 - c. How are work activities – both the range of acceptable activities and minimum number of required hours – set?
 - d. Which work activities are used most frequently?
 - e. What level of access do county workers have to IT system and data about program performance related to service delivery?
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. What technical assistance is needed to improve service delivery for TANF programs?
 - a. Training tools?
 - b. On-boarding materials?
 - c. Recruitment strategies?
 - d. Staffing tools?

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? (Probe: variation in rural/urban, small/large county, historic level of resources, political affiliation of county executives, geographic distance from the state capital, etc.)
2. Are there any other types of technical assistance that are needed to administer TANF programs? (Recount earlier examples, probe for each area: Communication, policy, IT, monitoring, service delivery)

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APPENDIX A-5

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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