
JOB SEARCH ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES (JSA) EVALUATION

INSTRUMENT 2

Discussion Guide for State and Local TANF Administrators

Introductory Script THE PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT OF 1995: Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 150 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. This information collection has been reviewed and approved by the Office of Management and Budget with OMB #: 0970-XXXX which expires on XX/XX/2016.

The Job Search Assistance Strategies (JSA) Evaluation is an evaluation designed to rigorously test the relative impacts of various job search assistance activities on moving TANF recipients to employment. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families is funding this study. We are interested in State and local TANF agencies that are providing a range of JSA activities to support the employment of their clients, including one-on-one services, group services, self-administered services, and job development.

We are beginning a field assessment and site selection phase of the project to understand what JSA services State and local TANF agencies provide, what combinations of services they provide, and how they provide them. We are also interested in learning more about what State and local TANF administrators and staff think are the most effective methods to move TANF clients to employment. Your participation in the study will help ACF understand the most important types of strategies that should be tested around the country within the context of current TANF policies and requirements. We have two main purposes for gathering your feedback. First we want to understand better your views on what States and localities are doing to provide JSA services, as well as what you think effective JSA services look like. Second, we aim to recruit sites and test strategies that are of high interest to the field. We want your feedback on particular JSA services or combination of services that should be experimentally tested using random assignment methods. In addition to any strategies or promising approaches you may know of, please be sure to let us know of existing programs that might be appropriate demonstration sites.

This interview takes about 150 minutes, and your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or end the interview at any time. We have systems in place to protect your identity and keep your responses private. In writing up our findings from these interviews, we never attribute anything to a specific respondent. The research staff participating in this study have signed notices that they will keep all information gleaned through these interviews private to the extent permitted by law.

Individual (s) Interviewed: (names and titles)

Sponsoring Organization:

Date of Communication:

Module A: Background

A1. [Current role] Please describe your current role in this program.

Probe: What is your current role/position in this program? Are you full-time or part-time; paid or volunteer?

A2. [Qualifications and Experience] Please tell me about your qualification and experience in this area.

Probes: Do you have any education in this area of social welfare administration or workforce development? Do you have experience facilitating activities like this? Any other qualifications

or experience? What is your career path?

A3. [Additional Background] Please tell me any other background information that we should know about this program, and your involvement in it.

Module B: Purpose of Job Search Assistance in the Site

B1. When you think about job search assistance strategies for the TANF population generally, are there groups or types of TANF clients that you focus on? Why this/these groups?

Probe: long-term TANF recipients, people approaching the time limit, former TANF families, families neither working nor receiving welfare assistance

B2. Obtaining employment is typically the overall objective for job search assistance services. That is, the point of providing these services is to help individuals obtain employment. However, some TANF programs have different philosophies that guide the JSA services that they provide. For example, a program may encourage clients to take any job as quickly as possible, while others may focus on finding a job that is a good fit for the client. Thinking about the JSA services that your agency provides, would you say that it fits one of these approaches?

Probes: Take a job as quickly as possible? Find the perfect fitting job? Can you say anything about how and why this is the case?

B3. How do funding decisions at the state or local level affect JSA services?

Probes: How do they affect the types of services?

Now I'd like to ask you some broad questions about your overall view of job search assistance services.

B4. Thinking about the job search assistance services your agency provides or other JSA services that you know about, can you tell me your thoughts on which JSA approaches may be most effective for TANF clients, including any specific combinations of approaches.

Probe: Why (or not) do you believe that these services may be effective? Are you aware of any evaluations of services?

Module C: Participants in Job Search Assistance

Now that we've discussed your state/locality's overall approach to providing JSA services, I'd like to ask you some specific questions about the populations, to whom you provide JSA services.

C1. Who receives job search assistance services in your state/locality?

Probe: do all TANF clients receive them? Why do some groups receive these services but not others?

C2. Does your state/locality target specific types of TANF clients for JSA services?

Probe: If so, why?

C3. Do the JSA services provided vary by the population served?

C4. In your opinion (or if you have data to support this), which types of TANF clients tend to benefit most in job search assistance?

Probe: Are there characteristics of TANF clients that help them to be better served by JSA services? Why this/these groups?

Module D: Job Search Assistance Activities and Operation

Next, I'd like to ask you some more detailed questions about the job search assistance services that your state/local agency provides.

D1. Can you walk me through the process of getting job search assistance services?

Probes: When does a client get these services? Do participants receive any other service before JSA services? What kind of assessment of the individual's employment history and skills is done before providing services, if any?

D2. Can you please describe the types of JSA services that your state/local agency provides?

Probes: One-on-one services, such as counseling, resume prep or mock interviewing? Group-based services, like job clubs? Self-guided services like access to computers or websites? Job developers? If they have job developers, how do they go about making connections with employers?

D3. If you contract out for JSA services, can you describe this process and how individuals are referred to the provider?

D4. Do people receive all JSA services available? Do they receive particular sets of services, such as one-on-one and self-guided, for example?

D5. What is the theory of change for the JSA services provided? That is, how do you expect these services to help clients gain employment?

D6. Who makes decisions about what JSA services an individual receives?

D7. Understanding that there are limits on how long someone's participation in JSA services can be counted as a work activity, about how long do participants receive JSA services on average? Do they participate in more hours of services than can be counted?

D8. Thinking about the JSA services that your state/local agency provides, are there other related services that you would like to provide to clients or think that clients need but aren't provided? If so, what are these services? Why are they not provided? Why do you think they would be helpful to clients?

D9. Please describe the challenges you face in implementing JSA services?

Probes: What issues do you think may impact efforts to improve these programs? Are there any

emerging issues, trends, or problems you see in the near future?

D10. Thinking about the JSA services that your agency provides, what parts of these services do you think are most effective at helping clients to obtain employment?

D11. If you could change anything about the JSA services that you provide or how you provide them, what would you change and why?

D12. What role does technology play in JSA in your state/locality? What role do you think technology should play?

Module E: Staffing

I'd like to ask you some questions about who provides JSA services.

E1. Who provides JSA services?

Probes: In-house staff? Contractor staff? Case workers?

E2. How are the individuals who provide JSA services trained?

E3. What are the qualifications of individuals who provide JSA services?

E4. What are the caseloads for the workers who provide JSA services?

Module F: Evaluation Readiness/Interest

As I mentioned at the beginning of this interview, we aim to conduct a rigorous test of the effectiveness of various JSA services on moving TANF clients to employment. We are currently talking to other state and local TANF agency administrators to learn about the JSA services that they provide. We are also gathering information that will help us select sites to participate in the study. The next set of questions will focus on understanding your interest and readiness for participating in the study.

F1. Please tell me any anecdotal stories you have heard about the outcomes of the JSA services you provide and their perceived outcomes.

F2. Please tell me about any experiences that you have had previously with evaluations of your JSA services?

F3. Sample size is an important aspect of an evaluation. How many clients receive job search assistance in your state/locality and over what period of time is that?

Probes: Past month? Past six months?

F4. What data do you systematically collect about JSA recipients, their service receipt, and their outcomes?

Probes: work history, length in JSA, wage when employed, etc.

F5. How interested are you in participating in an evaluation of job search assistance?

- F6. Rigorous evaluations sometimes require making adjustments to the program. How willing are you to change aspects of JSA services, such as varying services to recipients? How willing are you to withhold services from some individuals?
- F7. Are there any particular job search strategies that you think are interesting, but for which there is currently insufficient information about whether they work well to support a decision to implement them?
- F8. Do you recommend anyone else with whom we should speak who has additional information that might be helpful?

Program Materials to Obtain

Program Plans/Reports
Organization chart
Logic model
Outreach or recruitment materials
Evaluation reports or survey results