

OMB Approval No.:

Expiration Date:

STATE TANF DIRECTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

[Note: This guide is intended for respondents identified as state TANF directors in the 10 states selected for telephone interviews; extra attention may be taken for the subset of five states within this group selected for site visits. Respondents will be familiar with the issues, complexities, and realities of administering TANF programs (and solely state-funded programs, if applicable), especially related to the management of two-parent families within the caseload.]

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 located in Washington, DC. With me today is [name and position].

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (ACF/OPRE) is conducting a study of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program with a focus on two-parent families. The study is not an audit or evaluation of any single program. Rather, the purpose of this study is to provide information about the characteristics of two-parent families on or eligible for TANF; for example, we want to learn:

- What are the characteristics of two-parent families participating in or eligible to receive TANF, including the strengths and challenges of these families;
- What variety of services do two-parent families receive through TANF;

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- How do state policies help or hinder participation in TANF among two-parent families with particular characteristics; and
- How do the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of staff and/or eligible families help or hinder two-parent families' participation in TANF?

Privacy Statement *[Interviewer must read this]:*

This data collection effort is intended for the purpose of describing TANF programs' operations and needs specific to two-parent families. 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 September 2014 and will end in March 2016. 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. We are interested in learning about your ideas, experiences, and opinions about how to better serve two-parent families on or eligible for TANF. 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. 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. The OMB control number for the described information collection is 0970-XXXX and it expires XX/XX/XXXX.

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

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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.

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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, how would you describe the state's overall approach to serving two-parent families?
 - a. (Possible responses)
 - i. Funding mechanism: including two-parent families wholly within TANF (either relying on federal TANF or SSP/MOE funding), splitting between TANF and SSF programs, including wholly or largely through SSFs
 - ii. Degree of inclusiveness: As generous/restrictive as single-parent families, all things equal; less generous/more restrictive (i.e. more difficult to receive assistance); more generous/less restrictive (i.e. less difficult to receive assistance)
 - iii. Specialized non-cash assistance (e.g., targeted support services, job training, or child care)
3. How does [STATE] define two-parent families from a TANF, unit composition standpoint? (For example: cohabiting couples only)

(Probe, IF APPLICABLE: has same-sex marriage affected the definition of TANF two-parent families?)
4. Could you explain broadly how TANF eligibility and work activities are administered in [STATE]? For example, are work activities handled through the same human service office that determines TANF eligibility, or are they handled by another office or contractors? [Note: this question is particularly important for helping us develop the site visit schedules, although it is also useful for general context.]
5. An inherent feature of the TANF program is, of course, devolution of policy decisions to the states outside of a limited framework of federally-defined rules. Is there

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anything specific about STATE'S culture, traditions, or shared values that is likely to influence the provision of welfare, especially for two-parent families?

II. Structure and History of Two-Parent TANF Administration

I would like to ask some questions about the history of two-parent TANF programs in your state.

1. We want to understand how the provision of welfare benefits or services to two-parent families has evolved in [STATE]. From your recollection, can you give us a rough timeline of [STATE'S] fundamental changes to its approach on two-parent families?

Probes:

- a. Did the state have federal waivers to administer a more-customized AFDC program (i.e., diverge from elements of the AFDC UP program? If so: Can you describe some of the specific areas of divergence?)
 - b. Did policies change during the transition from AFDC to TANF? Following DRA changes to TANF in 2005? At other times?
2. What were the reasons, as you understand them, for changes to the approach?

(Probe: Prior to the Deficit Reduction Act, did [STATE] serve two-parent families in separate state programs out of work participation rate (WPR) considerations?)

III. Funding Levels and Mechanisms for Serving Two-Parent Families

I would like to focus now on how two-parent families fit in your state's financing of cash assistance.

1. First, based on our preparation work during an earlier task of this study, we compiled TANF, SSP-MOE, and SSF caseload information for states nationwide. Before getting into more-specific questions, I first want to confirm our understanding that your state funds these families...:

[SELECT AS APPROPRIATE PRIOR TO VISIT:]

- a. ...through federal TANF funds only
- b. ...through a mix of federal and SSP-MOE funds
- c. ...exclusively through SSP-MOE funds
- d. ...through a mix of federal and/or SSP-MOE funding and SSF streams

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- e. ...exclusively through SSF streams

Is this consistent with your understanding of [STATE'S] two-parent TANF funding?

2. I would now like to ask the same question, but for the total cash assistance caseload (i.e., **all unit types**)?
3. Specific to just two-parent families again, have funding levels or funding streams changed over time?

(Probe: potential shifts between TANF/SSP-MOE/and SSFs, especially pre-/post-DRA)

4. Again based on our preparation work during an earlier study task, we've compiled basic caseload numbers (number of recipients) for [STATE]. We have for FY [YEAR] your state showing an **overall (for all units)** TANF/SSP-MOE caseload of [CASELOAD NUMBER], and an SSF caseload of [CASELOAD NUMBER]. Does this sound correct?
5. Specific to two-parent families, for FY [YEAR], we show a TANF/SSP-MOE caseload of [CASELOAD NUMBER], and an SSF caseload of [CASELOAD NUMBER]. Does this sound correct?

IV. Data Tracking and Reporting

I would like to focus now on how your state produces and uses data, especially beyond what is required to be reported federally, such as information for decision making.

1. Does your state track outcomes or outputs or put in place any reports specific to two-parent families (either paper reports or electronic ones such as online or through a data dashboard)?

If not, does your state track outcomes or outputs for the overall caseload or other subgroups? For example, one way states may assess welfare program performance is by tracking client outcomes (for example, job placement rates). Another way is to track outputs related to serving clients (for example, the number of clients served in job-training sessions).

2. **If yes**, what do the reports or tracking look like? What are the specific measures? How are these reports used? When were the measures put in place? What circumstances may have led to the creation of these measures?)

Probe: Which of the following are measures [STATE] uses, either formally or informally, for tracking its two-parent TANF or SSF families:

- a. Program participation (take-up)

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- b. Client engagement
 - c. Official WPR engagement
 - d. Outcome-based measures (e.g., employment, retention, income, self-sufficiency)
 - e. Any others not covered above
3. How much importance does the state put on the two-parent work participation rate, compared to the all-families rate?

Probes:

- a. Do you feel pressure from others (e.g. legislature, governor, community stakeholders) to give it more or less importance?
 - b. How do you communicate or express the importance to others?
4. [IF THE ANSWER TO THE ABOVE QUESTION IS "SOME" OR "A LOT OF IMPORTANCE"] In your view, when (or in response to what circumstances) did the two-parent WPR come into focus?

V. Characteristics of Two-Parent Families On or Eligible for TANF

Now I would like to focus on the characteristics of two-parent families – either currently on or likely eligible in your view for TANF, both confirming information we’ve already compiled and exploring other aspects.

1. Before I ask specific questions about two-parent characteristics, a concurrent task of this study has been to undertake several quantitative data analyses on two-parent families on or likely eligible for TANF. Part of these data analyses includes a description of the characteristics of two-parent families receiving TANF. We’ve compiled [DRAFT/FINAL] numbers for [STATE], and we would like to run these values by you to see if they sound correct. We understand we haven’t asked you to pull or think about this information ahead of time, and as such, approximate answers are OK.

[NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: This question is only appropriate for states that pay for assistance to two-parent families with TANF or SSP-MOE funds. Data on SSF programs will not be available; adjust or skip this question as appropriate.]

Our data analyses found the following characteristics of two-parent families on or likely eligible for TANF:

- a. [DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION VALUES FOR [STATE] (i.e., race/ethnicity, ages, family relationships)]
 - b. [EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME INFORMATION FOR [STATE]]

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- c. [PROGRAM SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOR [STATE] (i.e., time limit and work-exemption status)]

Does any of that data surprise you? Does it differ from your perceptions or from other data you have seen?

- 2. Are there any other characteristics of two-parent families that aren't captured in our data that stand out to you?

(Probe: do you have data on these characteristics?)

- 3. To augment the data we already have, we would like to get an idea of the typical profile of a two-parent family on or eligible to receive TANF, as well as a sense of the range of characteristics of two-parent families on or eligible for TANF. To the extent that you know from your own data or that you have a perception, could you please describe the characteristics of two-parent families in [STATE] participating in or likely eligible to receive TANF? What types of recipients or potential recipients are you most likely to see?

[NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: Probe these areas if not mentioned explicitly; probe also whether responses are based on data or perceptions.]

- a. Demographics
(Probe: number of children; married or cohabiting status)
- b. Employment histories
(Probe: most-recent workforce attachment, spells of employment, average hours of participation, barriers to employment)
- c. Skill levels
- d. Incomes
- e. Disability status

- 4. In the above areas (demographics, employment histories, skill levels, incomes, disability status), have there been any noticeable, changes over time?

(Probe: possible or likely hypotheses for the changes)

- 5. How does the profile for two-parent TANF families differ from single-parent families?

- 6. [NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: This question is only for states that serve some two-parent families through TANF and others through SSF. For all other states, skip this question.]

Do the characteristics of families served through SSFs differ from those served through TANF? (If so, is that true for all families or just two-parent families?)

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(Probe: How is it determined which of these families to serve in SSFs vs. TANF? Which two-parent families are served through SSFs?)

7. What individual characteristics or family circumstances make it challenging for two-parent families to be self-sufficient? What are their strengths?

[NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: Probe these areas if not mentioned explicitly]

- a. Employment history
- b. Education and skill level
- c. Disability status
- d. Mental illness
- e. Substance abuse
- f. Criminal record

8. In your view, do two-parent families face the same challenges as single-parent families, or are these barriers likely different?

VI. Characteristics of Participating Families versus Likely Eligible Families

Some two-parent families may be eligible for TANF but don't apply. I would like to focus now on how, if at all, the characteristics of participating families differ from those of families who are eligible but not participating.

1. In your view, for two-parent families, are there any characteristics that likely differentiate families participating in TANF or SSFs versus families likely eligible but not participating?

(Probe: demographics, employment histories, skill levels, disability status, incomes, participation in other assistance programs)

2. Are these characteristics differences true also for eligible single-parent families that don't participate, or specific to two-parent families?
3. Both for all families and two-parent units, in your view, are the characteristics that likely differentiate participating and non-participating families part of a trend? (Have these indicators arisen recently?)

VII. Variety of Services Two-Parent Families Receive

Now I would like to focus on the variety of services accessed by two-parent families through the TANF program and explore if this differs from single-parent families.

Available Services

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1. What services are offered to two-parent families receiving cash assistance

(Potential areas: assessments, case management, training, job search, barrier removal, referrals, child care, transportation, etc.)?
2. [NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: both parts of this question are only for states that use both TANF and SSF funding to serve two-parent families; ELSE, SKIP]
 - a. Do services differ depending on whether the family is served through TANF or SSF?
 - b. Would eligibility staff, caseworkers, or employment service providers know if a family is served through TANF or through SSF?
3. What services are offered to two-parent families **not** receiving cash assistance?
4. Can you please briefly describe what each of the following services look like in the state? [NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: If the services differ by TANF/SSF/no cash, then ask first about services for TANF and then repeat for SSF and/or no cash.]
 - a. Outreach/information
 - b. Assessments
 - c. Case management
 - d. Barrier removal
 - e. Employment services (training, job search, etc.)
 - f. Child care
 - g. Transportation
 - h. Post-referral follow-up
 - i. Post-employment services
 - j. Transitional assistance
5. Are these services the same for single-parent and two-parent families?

(Probe: Are differences in services offered designed to be dissimilar by explicit policy or instead just due to natural differentiation?)
6. Does the state offer any other services specifically targeted or predominantly for two-parent families?
7. To what extent do two-parent families access, take-up, or use the services offered to them?
8. Do single-parent families use the services offered to them to the same extent (or more or less) as two-parent families?

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9. How do families on assistance learn about how to access services (e.g., outreach, recruitment, etc.)?

(Probe: are any outreach or recruitment efforts specific to two-parent families?)
10. How do families **not receiving cash** assistance learn about how to access services (e.g., outreach, recruitment, etc.)?
11. Do the services offered to and accessed by two-parent families vary depending on characteristics of the family (e.g., employment history, barriers to employment, cohabiting, access to child care)?

Do Services Meet Family Needs?

12. From your perspective, how well do you think the services offered meet the families' needs?
 - a. Are the services helpful?
 - b. What do you think the families need more or less of?
 - c. What are the most popular services that families take up?
 - d. Have you heard any feedback from families regarding the services offered?
13. Is it hard to have enough time to provide the needed services to families?
14. Are there any barriers to providing services?

VIII. State Policies and Two-Parent Family Participation

I would like to focus now on how, if at all, state policies may help or hinder participation in TANF among two-parent families with particular characteristics.

State Policies

1. I will ask in a moment about a broader range of specific areas of TANF rules, but first I wanted to confirm an initial analysis of your state's TANF rules that we undertook using the HHS-funded Welfare Rules Database (maintained by the Urban Institute).

We have down the following TANF policy areas being different for two-parent families:

- a. [INSTANCES OF ALL TANF POLICY AREAS FOUND]

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Do these policy areas sound correct, including the type and magnitude of the rule differences?

2. [Aside from the aforementioned rule differences, IF ANY,] Do policies or rules for two-parent families differ from those for single parent families?

(Probe: If so, do these policies apply uniformly to all two-parent families or do they depend on other family characteristics (e.g. work history, education level, etc.)?)

[Potential areas (probe if necessary)]

- a. Non-financial eligibility policy
 - i. Worker supplement program?
 - ii. Maximum or minimum limit on hours worked in a month in order for an applicant to be eligible?
 - iii. Work history test required for eligibility?
 - iv. Waiting period in place before a newly-unemployed family can receive benefits?
 - v. Changes over time/continuation of AFDC-era policy?
- b. Other policy:
 - i. Differences in eligibility levels/standards?
 - ii. Differences in benefit levels?
 - iii. Differences in time limits/time limit exemptions?
 - iv. Differences in activity requirements/activity exemptions?
 - v. Administrative differences vs. single-parent units?
 1. Application methods
 2. Case management
 3. Client tracking

3. [IF APPLICABLE FOR STATES WITH SSFs, ELSE SKIP] Are SSFs designed to include families whose characteristics suggest they would have difficulty meeting the work requirement?

(Probe: If yes, which characteristics?)

4. To what extent do WPR concerns or pressures influence two-parent policy or rule decisions?
5. In your view, are different rules for two-parent families (i.e., more stringent eligibility rules or less generous benefits) at least partially an expression of state values (versus solely due to budget or WPR considerations)?

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Effect of Policies on Participation

6. What is your sense of how TANF policies affect program participation for two-parent families?
 - a. What policies or practices facilitate their participation?
 - b. What makes it challenging?
 - c. Do you have any specific examples or data that inform your thoughts on this?

7. Do you have a sense of whether TANF policies influence low-income families' behavior or personal decisions in other ways?
(Probes:)
 - a. Employment-related decisions such as whether to work, which types of jobs to pursue, and how many hours to work
 - b. Whether to go back to school or seek new types of training
 - c. Whether to seek childcare outside of your home
 - d. Whether to delay or encourage having children
 - e. Whether to marry or cohabit
 - f. Do you have any specific examples or data that inform your sense of this?

8. Do you believe TANF policies affect two-parent families' participation differently than they affect single-parent families' participation?
 - a. Are differences in participation attributable to differences in policies, families, or both? Please explain.

IX. Staff Beliefs as Facilitating or Hindering Two-Parent Families' Participation

As a final topic area, I would like to focus now on how the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of staff may help or hinder two-parent families' participation in TANF.

1. In your view, how do the **characteristics, strengths, and challenges of two-parent families on or eligible for TANF** facilitate or hinder the family's ability to meet program requirements and/or achieve self-sufficiency?
 - a. Characteristics (e.g. any characteristics identified in section VI-- demographics, employment histories, skill levels, disability status, incomes--as differentiating two-parent families from single-parent families or nonparticipating families)
 - b. Strengths (e.g. ability to share household and child care responsibilities with partner)
 - c. Challenges
 - d. Stigma specific to two-parent families

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2. How do these compare with your perceptions of single-parent families? In other words, how do the characteristics, strengths, and challenges of **single-parent families on or eligible for TANF** facilitate or hinder the family's ability to meet program requirements and/or achieve self-sufficiency?
3. What characteristics of two-parent families make it challenging for staff or the program to serve two-parent families?

(Probe: biggest obstacles to self-sufficiency? Factor, if at all, of employment status or access to child care.)

X. **Wrap-Up – Desired Take-Aways from this Study for Self and Others**

Thank you so much for taking the time to share this information with us. As we mentioned at the beginning, we expect this study to result in a report and there may be other opportunities to share selected results. We sincerely hope that this study can be useful to you. So, before we finish, we would like to hear what you would most like others to know about your experiences serving two-parent families, and what you might like to learn from our study when it is completed.

1. In your view, what would you most want the world – either the public, federal policymakers, other state administrators, or whomever – to know about your (or your state's) experiences serving two-parent families through TANF?
2. . Is there anything you may immediately think of that you would most like to learn from this study when it is finished?

(Probe: What is the best format for sharing that information?)

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

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

Thank you.

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