

**COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVE(S)  
INTERVIEW GUIDE**

*[Note: This guide is intended for respondents identified as representatives of community-based organizations with familiarity of the TANF program in [STATE]. Respondents will be familiar with the experiences of low-income two-parent families not receiving TANF regardless of whether these families are eligible.*

*Wherever "TANF" appears in the guide, the interviewer should use the state-specific TANF and/or SSF program name, if applicable]*

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;
- 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?

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### **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 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.

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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. To get us started, would you please briefly describe the goals and activities of your organization?
2. Please describe your position/role with [COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION].  
  
(Probe: What is your job title? What are your responsibilities? How long have you held this role?)
3. How much do you work with the TANF-program issues? Do you work both with families who receive TANF and families who don't participate in TANF even though they might be eligible?
4. [IF FAMILIAR WITH TANF PROGRAM DETAILS] Based on a previous interview and research in preparation for this visit, we understand the statewide approach to serving low-income two-parent families to feature [QUICK SUMMARY OF PREVIOUSLY-OBTAINED INFORMATION, AS APPROPRIATE].

Is there anything else you would add, briefly, to describe the state's overall approach, especially related to serving two-parent families?

*Probes:*

- a. 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)
  - b. Specialized non-cash assistance (e.g., targeted support services, job training, or child care)
5. Our understanding is that [STATE] defines two-parent families from a TANF, unit composition standpoint as [BRIEF SUMMARY OF UNIT COMPOSITION REQUIREMENTS]. Does that sound correct, are you familiar with any difference in implementation or interpretation of the state's rules that may make unit composition requirements different in practice locally?

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(Probe, IF APPLICABLE: has same-sex marriage affected the definition of TANF two-parent families?)

6. Are you aware of any major changes in the state's approach to TANF, either generally or specifically related to how they serve two-parent families?
7. An inherent feature of the TANF program is, of course, devolution of policy decisions to the states (and in some cases, counties within states) outside of a limited framework of federally-defined rules. Is there anything specific about STATE'S culture, traditions, or shared values that is likely to influence the provision of welfare, especially for two-parent families?

(Probe: What about the culture, traditions, or shared values specific to this part of the state – is there anything specific about this area's cultural fabric that may influence how the welfare program is implemented locally?)

### II. Data Tracking and Reporting

*I would like to focus on how the state produces and uses data about its TANF program.*

1. Do you have access to any state data or reports about the TANF program? If so, please describe the data and how you use it.
2. Does your organization collect any data or produce any reports about TANF use, the needs of low-income families in your community, or other related matters? If so, please describe the data/reports and their purpose.
  - a. May we have a copy of any such reports?
3. Are you familiar with the work participation rate requirement – that the state is required to have a certain number of TANF families engaged in work or work activities? **If so**, how much importance, does the state (or potentially, from a sub-state level), place on the work participation rate? Is any more or less importance put on the work participation rate for two-parent families, as compared to single-parent families?

(Probe: How is that importance expressed or communicated by human services department leadership?)

### III. 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.*

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1. In your view, what are the characteristics of two-parent families specific to [COUNTY OR LOCALITY] 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]

- 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
2. In your view, how do the characteristics of low-income families in your community differ from the statewide average?
  3. How does the typical profile of a low-income (likely TANF-eligible) two-parent family differ from a typical single-parent family?
  4. On a local level, 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. In your experience locally, 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. Mental illness
  - d. Substance abuse
  - e. Criminal record
6. What is the typical employment history or prospects for employment of two-parent families your organization sees?
  7. In your view, do two-parent families face the same challenges as single-parent families, or are these barriers likely different?

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#### IV. Characteristics of Participating Families versus Likely Eligible Families

*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. Both for single and two-parent families, do you have a sense of the extent to which families eligible for TANF choose not to participate?
  - a. Does this differ based on the number of parents in the family?
  - b. Do these families participate in other programs, such as Medicaid or SNAP, and not TANF? (Or, do they not participate in any public assistance programs?)
2. In your view, for two-parent families, are there any characteristics that differentiate those families participating in TANF/SSFs versus families likely eligible but not participating?

(Probe: demographics, employment histories, skill levels, disability status, incomes (outside of consistently high income that would make a family ineligible))
3. Are these differences in the characteristics of participating and nonparticipating families true also for single-parent families, or are they specific to two-parent families?
4. Both for single and two-parent families, in your view, are the characteristics that likely differentiate participating and non-participating families part of a trend? (Have these indicators arisen recently?)
5. In your view, what precludes low-income two-parent families from participating? In other words, why might a two-parent family be eligible for TANF not participate?

#### V. 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 range differs from single-parent families.*

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. What services are offered to two-parent families **not receiving** cash assistance?
3. What does each of the following services look like in [COUNTY/LOCALITY]:

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- 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
4. 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 does it just happen in practice?)
5. Does the local office offer any services specifically targeted or predominantly for two-parent families?
6. To what extent do two-parent families access, take-up, or use the services offered to them? Do two-parent families use the services offered to them to the same extent (or more or less) than single-parent families?
7. 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, either within the human services department or from outside groups?)
8. [If applicable] How do families **not receiving cash assistance** learn about how to access services for which they are eligible?
9. 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)?
10. How well do you think (or have you heard from families) that the services meet their needs? Do families reporting needing more or less services?

## VI. State Policies and Two-Parent Family Participation

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

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details that are unfamiliar to you. If so, just let me know. We don't expect you to be able to answer all of these questions.

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 [STATE's] TANF rules that we undertook using the HHS-funded Welfare Rules Database (maintained by the Urban Institute) and confirmed in initial state-level interviews.

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

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

Do these policy areas sound correct?

2. As opposed to rules or policies that may be implemented statewide, are there any rules or policies unique to this county/locality or region for two-parent families that may 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

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3. In your view, are there any areas of policies or rules defined at the state level that may be interpreted differently in the field, possibly resulting in different experiences for recipients or potential recipients depending on where they live?
4. How would you describe the degree to which WPR concerns or pressures felt by the state may 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 values (versus solely due to budget or WPR considerations)?

### VII. 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 above--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
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 do staff believe make it challenging for the TANF program to serve two-parent families?

(Probe: biggest obstacles to self-sufficiency? Factor, if at all, of employment status or access to child care.)
4. Are these issues also challenges for your organization, or are they specific to the state program?

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

*Thank you so much for sharing 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, state administrators, other community-based organization leaders, or whomever – to know about your (or your organization’s) experiences with 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?)

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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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