

Two-Parent TANF Client One-on-One Discussion Guide

[Clients will be recruited with the assistance of local TANF agency and community-based organization staff. Participants will be at least 18 years of age and will be current or former participants in the TANF (or complementary SSF) program, or, likely eligible but not enrolled in TANF. At least one one-on-one interview with respondents will be held in each of the 5 study sites.]

[NOTE: WHEREVER "TANF" APPEARS IN THIS GUIDE, THE MODERATOR SHOULD USE THE STATE-SPECIFIC TANF/SSF PROGRAM'S NAME, IF APPLICABLE.]

Introduction and Consent

Thank you for coming and agreeing to participate in this discussion today.

Who are we? My name is [name], and I'm a researcher from the Urban Institute, a non-profit research organization located in Washington, DC. With me today is [name]].

Why am I here? The Urban Institute asked [local TANF program or community-based organization] to invite people to participate in interviews such as this one both here in [STATE] and in four other locations across the country that are part of this study. The Urban Institute, on behalf of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is studying two-parent TANF programs and the characteristics of families on or eligible for benefits. We hope that this study will be useful for sharing information about the strengths of the TANF programs and identifying lessons to share with other states and the federal government.

We are visiting five communities and will be speaking with local TANF staff, leaders from community groups, and recipients or potential recipients such as you to better understand the issues in the study sites. 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.

We are interested in learning about your ideas, feelings, and opinions about TANF in [community]. There are no right or wrong answers. We want to know what you think. Your participation is very important to the success of this study.

What happens with the information shared during these interviews? We will use what we learn today and from other interviews and discussion groups to contribute to a report describing the five TANF programs we visit. This report will be submitted to HHS to inform the federal government about the strengths and challenges of states' programs and also provide information about the diverse characteristics of recipients.

How does this work? The session today should last about one hour. At the end of this session, we will ask you to complete a short, anonymous background information form. You will receive a [CASH GIFT/ GIFT CARD/VOUCHER of \$30] as a token of appreciation for participating.

Are there any questions before we begin? We'll start by going over the consent to participate.

Privacy Statement [*Interviewer must read this*]:

Participation in this interview is voluntary, which means that you don't have to participate and you can decide not to answer any specific questions. There are no consequences for choosing not to participate or not to answer any question. You can also end the interview at any point and you will still receive a [CASH GIFT/ GIFT CARD/VOUCHER of \$30] as a token of appreciation for participating

We will keep the information you provide private and will not be share it with anyone except for research staff working on the study. This includes anything that can identify you such as your name, address, or telephone number. Information is never repeated with the name of a participant in any reports or in any discussions with program staff or HHS. When we write our reports and discuss our findings, information from all the people we speak with is compiled and presented so that no one person can be identified. Everyone who works on this survey has signed a legal document stating they will not reveal any of your personal information and can be severely penalized if they do.

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 destroy the recordings as soon as we have made complete notes of the meeting, and those notes will not use your names. Also, as we said, we will not use your name in preparing any reports and will disguise your comments so that no one can identify who made specific comments. Do you have an objection to recording this interview?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

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Background Questions

To get us started, we would like to learn a little more about your family and the assistance you might receive.

1. How many children do you have?
2. Are you married? Are you living with a partner?
3. Are you currently receiving cash assistance?

(If so)

- a. How long have you been receiving cash assistance?
- b. Have there been times when you stopped assistance for a while and then started again? If so, briefly tell us about those situations.

(If no)

- c. Have you ever received cash assistance, and if so, about how long ago?
 - d. Do you currently receive Medicaid? SNAP? Child care assistance? Other supports?
4. Are you currently working for pay?

(Probe: Jobs held in the last year, hours worked per week, type of job, employment prospects, etc.)

- a. Please also tell us about your past employment.
 - b. What are some of the things that make it hard to get and keep a job that pays enough to make ends meet?
5. Please tell us about your educational background. For example, did you finish high school or attend college? *(Probe as appropriate about highest level of education, field of study, etc.)*

TANF Services [This section applies only to those receiving TANF services]

I would like to continue by hearing more about your experiences with the TANF program. We're interested in learning about how your family accesses a variety of services related to TANF, including cash assistance. We're going to ask a few questions about what services are most

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important to your family, how you learned about those services, and how easy or difficult it has been to get assistance.

1. In addition to [cash assistance or local term] what services do you and your family receive?
 - a. *(If not currently receiving assistance):* What services have you and your family received?
(Probe: assessments, case management, training, job search, barrier removal, child care, transportation, post-referral follow-up, post-employment services, transitional assistance)
2. [For recipients] How long have you received these services?
3. [For recipients] Have there been interruptions in the services you receive?
(Probe: For what reasons?)
4. How important would you say the following services are to you and your family:
 - a. Cash assistance
 - b. Assessment/screening/case management
 - c. Employment counseling
 - d. Training/education
 - e. Social services
5. How did you learn or hear about the types of services or benefits you've received through TANF?
(Probe: specific outreach and recruitment efforts by the state human services department, community service organizations, and peer networks.)
6. What are some of the difficulties you've experienced in getting cash assistance?
7. What was your experience like applying for benefits?
 [If applicable] How did you know what to do, such as where to go and what you needed to bring with you? How easy or hard was it to figure out what you needed to do to get benefits?
(Probe: getting to the TANF office, understanding the program, working with people at the TANF office)
8. Tell us about the documents you needed to turn in. How easy or hard was it to gather those documents and turn them in?

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9. How many times did you need to connect to the office before you received the benefits?

(Probe: Did you tend to come in person, call on the phone...)

10. What is it like when you come in to the office?

(Probes: How long do you have to wait? Is it a comfortable and safe place to be? How is it to bring children with you?)

11. Tell us about your interactions with staff.

(Probes: Are they friendly and polite? Are they able to answer your questions and give you the help you need?)

12. How easy or difficult is it to receive employment counseling/services?

(Probe: Does the office that helps you with TANF also help you get other supports?)

13. How easy or difficult is it to meet work requirements?

(Probe: What are the work participation requirements of the TANF program? Are there exceptions to the rule? Do you think this is fair? What happens if a household does not meet its work requirements?)

14. How easy or difficult is it to reapply for benefits or provide information the state needs to keep you on assistance?

15. How easy or difficult is it to know how long you are able to receive assistance?

(Probe: What is the time limit for receiving TANF benefits? Are there exceptions to the rule? Do you think this requirement is fair?)

16. What about the process is most confusing?

(Probe: range of benefits, applying for benefits, receive employment counseling, meeting work requirements, recertifying/reapplying, understanding time limits)

17. Are there services that you could be receiving that you are not receiving?

18. In your community, what do people think about TANF or other public assistance?

Access and Family Characteristics

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I'd now like to focus on some of the specific things that make accessing the program difficult or easier, and how that might relate to the specific circumstances of your family.

1. Why did you decide to participate? What made you go through the process of applying?
2. What personal characteristics or family circumstances have helped you participate in the program?

(Probe: For example, access to child care, employment history, cohabiting. Or, for example, personal characteristics like race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.)

3. What personal characteristics or family circumstances have made it harder for you to participate in the program?

(Probe: For example, access to child care, employment history, cohabiting. Or, for example, personal characteristics like race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.)

4. Is there anything else that has helped or made it harder for you to participate?
 5. Sometimes people feel outside pressures not to apply for or receive benefits. Have you ever felt that way?
 6. What family circumstances or personal characteristics make it hard for you and your family to get by?
- (Probe: employment history, education and skills level, mental illness, substance abuse, criminal record)*
7. What is one of your strengths, or a family circumstance that helps you get by? (e.g. ability to share household and child care responsibilities with partner)
 8. Looking to the future, what do you think your life will be like in 5 years? (Will you still be receiving some assistance? Will you earn enough wages to support your family without assistance?)

How TANF Affects You

We understand that TANF rules are sometimes different for two parent families than for single parents. We'd like to talk about how TANF rules influence you and your family.

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1. If the rules were that you could only get TANF if you were single, or only if you were married, would that influence your decision about whether to marry your partner or live together?
2. Do TANF policies influence your 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*

Wrap-up

Finally, before we finish, we'd like to ask about your recommendations for ways to improve services and the TANF program.

1. What services not offered by the state/county do you feel you and your family would benefit from most?
2. If you could change the TANF program to better meet your needs, how would you change it?
3. Has the TANF program made a difference for you and your family?
 - a. If so, what part of the TANF program has been the biggest help?
 - b. If you could alter the TANF program to better meet your needs, how would you do this?
4. In your view, what would you most want the world – either other people or recipients, federal policymakers, state administrators, or whomever – to know about your experiences receiving TANF as a member of a two-parent family?
5. 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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That concludes the discussion. Thank you for participating. We really appreciate you taking the time to speak with us!

Ask participants to sign a stipend receipt.

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