

Introductory Script

We are conducting the TANF Office Culture study, funded by the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its purpose is to understand TANF office cultures, office settings, and agency changes. The information you share today will help the Administration for Children and Families better understand how TANF office cultures affect services for customers.

The Administration for Children and Families hired two outside groups to conduct this study, MEF Associates and MDRC. I work for MEF Associates and am based in [city]. As part of the study, we are visiting a number of TANF offices across the country. We are talking with individuals who help implement or administer TANF programs, contracted partners, and some current and former TANF participants as well. We have a series of questions prepared about your role at [insert agency name], your interactions with clients and other staff, and your perceptions of [insert agency name]’s processes, goals, and organizational culture.

Before beginning our discussion, we want to thank you for agreeing to talk with us today. We know you are busy and will try to be as focused as possible. The interview will take about 60 minutes.

Please take a few minutes to review this consent form [hand respondent consent form]. It notes that your participation is voluntary, and there are no penalties for choosing not to take part in the interview. Although your answers are important to the study, you can refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time. Our aim is to learn from your insights and experience, not to audit or judge your agency or programs.

Every effort will be made to keep information private to the extent permitted by law. However, because of the relatively small number of organizations participating in the study, there is a possibility that a response could be correctly attributed to you. Information you provide will not be shared with any other staff at your program or organization, including your supervisor and agency leadership. Only the study team will have access to the information you provide through this interview. Your name will not be listed in any published reports, and comments will not be attributed to you. Instead, your information will be combined with information provided by others.

Once you have taken a minute to review the consent form, please let me know if you have any questions before we begin.

Staff Consent Form
TANF Office Culture Study

Thank you for agreeing to participate in today’s discussion. Your participation is very important to this study. MEF Associates is working with [*insert local program name*] and programs like this around the country that provide services to families. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is funding this study. The information you share today will help HHS and TANF agencies better understand how TANF office cultures affect services for customers.

This discussion will last about 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary and involves no significant risks to you. You can choose not to answer any of the questions or stop the discussion at any time.

We will take notes and audio record the discussion. Only members of the research team will hear the recording. The notes and recording will be destroyed at the end of this study. We will not include your name or any other identifying information in any reports from the study, and we will not use your name or any other personal information in any quotes we use. Information will be kept private to the extent permitted by law.

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research, you are not satisfied with the response of the research team, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the project director, Mary Farrell, at MEF Associates at 703-838-2723 at any time.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

Signing this consent form indicates that you understand and are willing to participate in this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this signed and dated consent form.

Participant Name (please print: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of Researcher obtaining this Authorization: _____

The Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This collection of information is voluntary and will be used to help HHS and TANF agencies understand how TANF office cultures affect services for clients. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 60 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. The OMB number and expiration date for this collection are OMB #: 0970-XXXX, Exp: XX/XX/XXXX. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Mary Farrell at mary.farrell@mefassociates.com, or call (703) 838-2723.

Interview Questions (Frontline Staff)

I. Introduction and Respondent Background

- First, could you please state your title and provide a brief overview of your duties?
 - How long have you worked for [*insert agency name*]?
 - How long have you been in your current position?
 - [If veteran staff member] What other positions have you held?
- What originally motivated you to enter this field?
- What training or education did you receive prior to entering this field?
- Are you a member of any teams or work groups?
 - What is/are the purposes of that/those team(s)?
 - How do you communicate with other team members? Do you meet in person? If so, how often?
 - How is work distributed among team members?
- As I mentioned earlier, this study is about organizational culture in TANF offices. People have lots of different ways of thinking about organizational culture. How would you describe your agency's culture?
 - *Probe: What are some of the informal rules or norms related to “how things go” around here? If you were orienting a new hire as a [same position as respondent], what would you tell them about what it's like to work here?*

II. Service Delivery Flow and Respondent Role

We'd like to get a sense of the general steps of service delivery for clients at your agency to help us understand how clients experience the TANF program and learn more about your role in that process.

Note to interviewer: Please note that some processes inevitably vary less for clients (e.g., application) than others, so staff associated with these processes may be less equipped to discuss variation at these stages. Use prompts accordingly.

- Please walk me through the typical flow for clients from the point of applying for TANF at [*insert agency name*].
 - How long does each step in the process typically take?
 - [If respondent works in employment services case management role]: Please walk me through the typical flow for clients who are referred to [*insert name of the employment services program*].

- What are your specific duties in this process?
- When clients are receiving [*insert respondent's role*] services, are they served by a designated staff member, or can they be served by any staff member?
 - Does this vary by point in the process? How?
 - Do you see any benefits of this staffing arrangement? If so, what?
 - Do you see any disadvantages of this staffing arrangement? If so, what?
- Are you able to use your discretion when you provide the services you described above? If so, how?
 - *Probe on discretion in various service delivery areas (e.g., developing employment plans; determining how often to meet with clients; determining whether to sanction client(s), granting time limit extensions).*
 - For what kinds of things do you have to check in with a supervisor before you do something differently?

III. Client Experiences

Now I'd like to ask you about clients' experiences accessing program services.

- Generally speaking, how easy is it for clients to navigate the steps in [*insert agency name*]'s TANF program?
 - What works well about this process [e.g., intake or eligibility review] for clients?
 - What aspects create challenges for your clients?
- Have you been able to make any changes to the general service delivery process to make it easier for clients?
 - What was the effect of this change on client experiences?
- [If not previously discussed] Has [*insert agency name*] taken any steps to make it easier for clients to access services? If so, what were they?
 - *Probe: technological tools to reduce paperwork or the number of in-person office trips, workload or staffing changes to facilitate effective staff-client interactions (e.g., specialized units)*
- Sometimes physical spaces or images can have positive or negative influences on people's experiences.
 - What do you think clients notice or experience when they walk into [*insert agency name*]?
 - What would you *like* clients to notice or experience when they walk into [*insert agency name*]?
- Sometimes other interfaces such as websites and print materials can have positive or negative influences on people's experiences. What do you think clients experience when they [use the [*insert agency name*] webpage; receive [*insert agency name*] mail; call the hotline- however clients interact with the program]?

- What is it about your work that influences client experiences the most?
- How do you think the organizational culture affects client’s progress within the program?
- What do you like about working with this population? What are the challenges?

IV. Peer Interaction and Social Institutions

Now we’d like to learn more about your interaction with other staff throughout the agency.

- What opportunities do you have to interact with other staff? Are there any regular get-togethers or meetings?
 - *Probe: Work events focused on clients (e.g., case conferencing), social events, staff meetings, etc.*
 - What is the purpose of each of these events (e.g., team building, purely social, otherwise)?
- How is “good work” acknowledged at [*insert agency name*], either by leadership, supervisors, or fellow staff?
 - *Probe: Specific awards, newsletter spotlights, job celebrations, etc.*
- How do you think the social environment including [*any events or rituals noted above*] contribute to clients’ experiences at the agency?

V. Agency Goals

*Thank you. This has been very useful information about the flow for clients and the different ways staff interact at [*insert agency name*]. Now we’d like to broaden out a bit and talk about your goals and your perception of the agency’s goals.*

- What do you consider your primary goal(s) in your position?
 - *Probe: Ensuring compliance (e.g., meeting work participation rate), helping clients achieve their goals*
- In your opinion, what are the most important goals for [*insert agency name*], as a whole?
 - *Probe: Goals related to the way in which [*insert agency name*] works with clients? Financial/fiscal goals? Efficiency (e.g., accuracy, timeliness, reducing fraud)? Emphasis on Work Participation Rate? Long-term outcomes such as employment or poverty reduction?*
 - How are these goals and priorities decided? What is your role in deciding them?
 - Have these priorities changed over time since you started working at [*insert agency name*]? If so, how?
- Once decided, how does agency management message these priorities to staff?
 - *Probe: Meetings, emails, letterhead slogans, posters*
- Does leadership support you in reaching these goals? If so, how?

- What trainings, staffing arrangements, incentives, or opportunities for recognition has the agency implemented to enable you to better achieve these goals?
- Is there anything that makes these goals hard to achieve?
 - *Probe: Conflicting goals, rules, workload, informal messaging throughout agency*
 - How do things outside the agency’s control (e.g., budget or political climate) influence the way [insert agency name] does its work?
- Is your performance evaluated? If so, how?
 - *Probe: Regular performance reviews? What is the format (e.g., formal or informal) and frequency?*
 - Is this process referenced throughout the year? If so, how?
 - Is your performance tied to your clients’ wellbeing? If so, how?

VI. Organizational Learning and Innovation

Next, we’d like to talk about the agency’s approach to change and innovation.

- How would you describe management’s openness to new ideas from staff?
 - If you had a new idea for a way to improve processes tomorrow, what would you do?
 - Since you have worked here, has the agency implemented a change that you would consider “innovative?” [If yes], please explain.
 - What did this involve, and how did it improve services for clients?

===== **Use Section VII below only for sites that have undergone intentional organizational culture change efforts. SKIP to Section VIII if no change effort researched in advance.** =====

VII. Perception of Organizational Culture Change Initiatives

Now we’d like to discuss the [insert local name of change effort/system redesign] that [insert agency name] implemented in [insert year]. Are you familiar with this initiative? [Confirm understanding before proceeding to questions below].

Note to interviewer: Some sites may call this a “process” change initiative rather than a “culture” change initiative. Please adapt to site-specific wording.

- What do you think the primary change that resulted from [insert name of change effort] was?
 - How did this change affect your duties?
 - How did it affect services for clients?
 - How did it affect the agency as a whole?

- Are there any new agency priorities associated with this change? If so, what are they?
- Thinking back prior to this change, did leadership talk to staff in your position about this change before it was implemented?
 - [If yes] What did they say or ask? Did they seek feedback? If so, how did they do so (e.g., interviews, surveys, focus groups)? How do you think they used your feedback?
 - [If yes] Do you feel like your perspectives were taken into account in the formulation of the new policy/process?
- Did leadership talk to you about this change as it was being implemented?
 - [If yes] What did they say or ask? Did they seek feedback? If so, how did they do so (e.g., interviews, surveys, focus groups)? How do you think they used your feedback?
 - [If yes] Do you feel like your perspectives were taken into account in the formulation of the new policy/process?
- Overall, how do you think this process/culture change affects clients' wellbeing?

VIII. Conclusion

- In conclusion, is there anything else you'd like to share with us that you think makes your agency's culture unique? Is there anything you'd like to share in general?

Thank you for speaking with us about [insert agency name]'s processes, goals, and organizational culture.