

# **How TANF Agencies Support Families Experiencing Homelessness**

**OMB Information Collection Request  
New Collection**

## **Supporting Statement**

### **Part B**

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Administration for Children and Families  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) seeks approval for data collection activities for a descriptive study aimed at understanding how the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is assisting families who are currently or at-risk of experiencing homelessness. ACF seeks OMB approval for four data collection instruments that will be used as part of the field assessment:

1. TANF Administrator Web Survey (Attachment A);
2. Site Visit Discussion Guide for TANF staff (Attachment B);
3. Site Visit Discussion Guide for Staff at Continuums of Care (CoC)/Partner Organizations (Attachment C);
4. Site Visit Focus Group Guide (Attachment D);

The proposed data collection activities described in this justification will collect information on:

- How states are using TANF support to address homelessness, both directly and indirectly by partnering with local programs;
- The relationships between state agencies, local agencies, and organizations supporting those experiencing homelessness;
- How TANF agencies decided on and implemented their approaches to address homelessness; and
- TANF agency staff and partner agency staff perceptions around the approach, including their perceptions of the challenges in implementation, effectiveness, and transferable lessons.

This justification provides supporting statements for each of the five points outlined in Part B of the OMB guidelines.

## **B1. Respondent Universe and Sampling Methods**

The respondent universe for this study includes: (1) state, territory, and county Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) administrators, (2) managers and staff of state or county TANF agencies, Continuums of Care (CoCs), and other partner organizations, and (3) TANF recipients.

### *TANF administrators*

For the TANF Administrator Web Survey, the universe of respondents is all state and territory TANF administrators (56), as well as a sample of TANF administrators in three counties in each state (150). The sample of county administered TANF programs will be chosen as follows. First, using data from the 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, we will select the two counties with the largest number of homeless families. Then, we will select a suburban or rural area with the largest number of homeless families for a total of three counties in each state. This mix of TANF county administrators will help ACF better understand how TANF is being utilized to assist homeless families in communities of differing sizes and in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

### *TANF agency, CoC, and partner organization staff*

For the site visits, we will purposefully select five TANF programs to visit. The study team will identify TANF programs with variation in the following criteria: population size of state; proportion of homeless families in location; whether state or county-administered TANF program; region of the country; urban, suburban and/or rural geographies; and variety of homeless assistance activities funded with TANF resources.

To identify potential TANF programs to participate in site visits, we will draw upon the knowledge of members of the study team, as well as up to nine subject matter experts in both TANF policy and

homeless assistance policy. In addition, we will discuss potential sites with stakeholder organizations, such as the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) and National Association of State TANF Administrators (NASTA). After gathering input from internal and external sources, we will convene several conference calls and/or email exchanges with central and regional ACF Office of Family Assistance (OFA) staff to discuss any suggestions they may have. From this research, we will work with the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) to identify a list of nine potential TANF agencies to visit.

To learn more about these nine site visit candidates, the study team will develop a semi-structured topic guide to facilitate exploratory conversations with each site to clarify their approach and gauge the TANF agencies' interest in study participation. A telephone call with a staff member at each agency will help us gather more information about: funding sources for homelessness services; types of approach(es) used to identify, assess, and/or serve homeless families; rationale for approach; number of people served, goal, and time since start of program; nature and strength of relationships with homelessness providers and CoC; caseload size; and budget.

After learning more about these nine programs, the Abt team will identify five proposed sites and two alternates. Upon approval from the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), the Abt team will extend those agencies formal invitations to participate in a site visit. We anticipate that the TANF agencies will agree to participate because the Abt team will have already discussed their participation during prior interactions. The Abt team will immediately contact OPRE if any of the five sites selected is unsure or unwilling to participate in order to substitute one of the alternate sites.

#### *TANF recipients*

To collect information about the perspectives and opinions of TANF recipients, two of the five site visits will include participant focus groups. These focus groups will offer insight about participants' experience and attitudes related to their state or local TANF program as well as local housing and homelessness programs. Each individual will receive a \$25 gift card.

## **B2. Procedures for Collection of Information**

#### *TANF Administrator Web Survey*

Abt Associates will administer an online survey to all state and territory TANF administrators and a sample of three county administered TANF programs in each state. The language in the survey will be tailored to respondents from either state or county-administered programs. Prior to launching the TANF Administrator Web Survey, the Abt team will submit the entire list of selected TANF administrators to ACF to obtain up-to-date contact information.

After programming the survey, we will pre-test the survey on paper with two state TANF agencies and one county TANF agency to ensure that all questions are clear. To minimize burden, we will provide the answers from the pre-test to these agencies, allowing them to confirm and update any information when they complete the web survey. We also will rigorously test the survey to ensure that prompts, question skip logic, and question routing are correct.

Once the state and county versions of the survey are ready to be administered, the team will request that OPRE and OFA send an initial email, using the updated contact list, explaining the purpose of this study and its importance. The Abt team will then send an email restating our introduction and purpose, and providing each recipient a unique URL address and instructions for completing the survey. The link will be specific to the TANF agency, not the individual, allowing the contact to forward the survey to a colleague to complete. The email will also provide the Project Director and COR contact information. The survey will be administered in Survey Monkey, an online survey platform.

If we receive a bounce back email, we will search online for an updated email or contact ACF regional staff to confirm the contact information for the TANF agency. To ensure high rates of participation, the Abt team will also solicit the assistance of key stakeholder membership organizations, including the National Association of State TANF Administrators (NASTA) and regional ACF staff to encourage survey completion.

#### *TANF agency site visits*

The study team will conduct site visits to five TANF agencies to gain more detailed, in-depth information about select agencies' approaches to assisting families experiencing and at-risk of homelessness. Each site visit will be conducted by a two-person team comprised of a senior member and a junior staff member. The senior staff member will lead the interviews and facilitate the two focus groups. A junior staff member will assist with notetaking and drafting summaries of each visit. Prior to the visit, the site visitors will review the information collected from each site through the document review and state and county TANF administrator surveys. The Site Visit Discussion Guide for TANF Staff is included as Attachment B.

While waiting for OMB clearance, the research team plans to pilot the Site Visit Discussion Guide for TANF Staff (Attachment B) and the Site Visit Discussion Guide for Staff at CoCs/Partner Organizations (Attachment C) by conducting a preliminary site visit. After the preliminary site visit, the staff will revise the instruments as necessary based on feedback and experiences on the site visit. This feedback will be incorporated into the survey which will be submitted to OMB during pass back.

To coordinate the site visits, the research team will identify an agency-level point-of-contact (POC), such as the program director or office manager and supervisor, for each of the sites approved by the COR. The research team will work with the POC to identify potential visit dates in Summer/Fall 2019, and outline an agenda for the two-day visit. The agenda will include the schedule for interviewing TANF office staff, observations of orientation or intake sessions with clients, and interviews with representatives from relevant homelessness organization partners. The agenda will vary depending on the agency's size, the office locations, and the range/number of partners. Where geographically feasible, the research team will visit more than one TANF office to identify any variations across office locations. The study team will interview up to 17 staff employed by the TANF agency who specifically provide case management or services to address family homelessness. The observations of intake sessions will offer insight into the agencies' use of risk and barrier assessments, its description of available services, and how it refers to and collaborates with other local services for families experiencing homelessness. During the visits, the study team will collect any documents used by TANF agency staff, such as assessment tools, orientation materials, and evaluation reports. If the TANF office administers client feedback forms, we will also ask for copies of recently completed forms in order to better understand how clients perceive the TANF services currently offered.

In addition to interviewing TANF agency staff, the Abt team will also interview up to seven representatives from the local CoC. Prior to making contact with the TANF agency, the research team will identify the CoC(s) that operate within the same jurisdiction. The Abt team will then ask the TANF agency POC to identify any additional partners within the CoC, including programs that serve homeless families. The Abt team will also look into whether the local public housing agency (PHA) prioritizes homeless families. If the PHA has a preference for assisting homeless families, we will interview PHA staff as part of the site visit. The Site Visit Discussion Guide for Staff at Continuums of Care (CoCs)/Partner Organizations is included as Attachment C.

### *TANF recipient focus groups*

We will work to convene TANF recipient focus groups during two of the site visits to learn more about how the TANF program assists families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. The senior site visitor will work with the TANF agency's point of contact to identify individuals to participate in the session. Abt will provide a recruitment letter that introduces the study and can be shared with potential participants. At each location, the study team will work with the case manager to recruit 12 individuals, some of whom are heads of households from families' currently experiencing homelessness and others who may be at-risk of homelessness. Once an individual agrees to participate, we will also have them sign a consent form prior to participating. We do not anticipate that this recruitment will place additional burden on staff. The Site Visit Focus Group Guide is included as Attachment D and the recruitment letter and consent forms are included in Attachment F.

### **B3. Methods to Maximize Response Rates and Deal with Nonresponse**

This study uses a quantitative and qualitative approach to document TANF policies. As described above, the study team will select sites that, as a group, will inform OPRE and others about the ways that TANF agencies operate and provide useful lessons to understand how TANF is assisting homeless families to inform future policies. We expect response rates to be sufficiently high for the survey of TANF administrators and among the sites selected to provide an in-depth understanding of a range of ways that TANF agencies are assisting families currently experiencing or at-risk of homelessness.

We expect the following response rates:

- *TANF Administrator Survey*: The study team anticipates achieving an 80 percent response rate on the web survey of TANF administrators. The survey is being administered online to elicit the highest response rate possible. In 2012, Abt conducted a study for HUD that included an online survey of public housing agencies.<sup>1</sup> Given the similar group of agency administrator respondents, the study team believes it is possible to achieve an 80 percent response rate for this comparable survey.
- *Staff at TANF agencies and CoCs*: Because the study team will be working with staff and managers who have expressed their interest in participating, response rates will be close to 100 percent. In the event of scheduling conflicts, the research team will conduct follow-up telephone interviews at a time convenient to the respondent.
- *TANF recipients*: The study team will recruit TANF recipients who are interested in participating in the focus groups. We plan to recruit 10-12 individuals per site to yield focus groups of 8-10 individuals yielding response rates of 80-90 percent.

#### ***B.3.1 Dealing with Nonresponse***

##### *TANF administrator survey*

OFA will send an introductory email to all TANF administrators explaining the purpose of the TANF administrator survey and its importance. The study team will then follow with an email providing more information and the survey link. The study team will carefully monitor response rates and contact non-respondents to encourage participation in the survey.

##### *Site visits*

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<sup>1</sup> Study of PHA's Efforts to Serve People Experiencing Homelessness, accessed at [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/homeless/pha\\_homelessness.html](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/homeless/pha_homelessness.html)

The strategy to collect qualitative data during site visits will ensure that the responses rates are high and the data are reliable. Site visit team members will contact site staff well in advance of each visit to ensure that the timing of the visit is convenient. Because the visits will involve several interviews each day, there will be flexibility in the scheduling of specific interviews to accommodate the particular needs of respondents and site operations.

#### *Focus groups*

To address non-response bias in the focus groups with individuals receiving TANF assistance, we will offer participants a \$25 gift card. These cards will be distributed at the beginning of the sessions to ensure that all participants they can end their participation at any time.

### **B.3.2 Maximizing Response Rates**

#### *TANF administrator survey*

To ensure an 80 percent response rate for the TANF Administrator Survey, Abt staff will send up to five email reminders to non-respondents. Two weeks after the survey link has been emailed, the Abt team will send the first email reminder to all TANF administrators that have not responded to the survey. At four weeks, the study team will send the second email reminder to non-responders. At five weeks, we will begin sending the remaining three email reminders on a weekly basis.

In addition to email reminders, the Abt team will work with ACF regional staff and NASTA to encourage survey completion of key respondents (state TANF agencies and county-administered agency with the largest number of homeless families). The study team will also provide support to respondents via a study-specific email account that will be regularly monitored and through a designated telephone help line.

#### *Site visits*

Strategies to ensure that the data are reliable and as complete as possible include flexibility in scheduling of visits and the assurance given to respondents of privacy of the information they provide. Furthermore, the neutral tone of the questions in the data collection protocols and the absence of sensitive questions, along with the training of the site visitors, will facilitate a high degree of accuracy in the data.

#### *Focus groups*

At the start of the session, the focus group facilitator will share that the session is private and any information cannot be shared. The facilitator will also reinforce that there are no right or wrong answers and that participants can share both positive and negative experiences. The focus group will begin with an icebreaker to introduce all participants and make them feel comfortable.

## **B4. Tests of Procedures or Methods to be Undertaken**

During the review period of the request for OMB clearance, the study team completed a pilot test of the Site Visit Discussion Guide with TANF agency staff and the Site Visit Discussion Guide for Staff at CoCs/Partner Organizations at one location with nine or fewer individuals. Abt staff also pilot tested the TANF Administrator Web Survey instrument with two TANF administrators via telephone during fall 2018.

During our pilot test, the research team accommodated case managers' existing schedules to make participation more convenient. Further, the team interviewed case managers in pairs for minimal disruption to their day. The interviews took between 60-90 minutes to complete. The site visit team was able to interview staff from all partner organizations and the CoC and had no problems scheduling these meetings.

**B5. Individual(s) Consulted on Statistical Aspects and Individuals Collecting and/or Analyzing Data**

The individuals listed in Exhibit B-1 are contributing to the design of the study:

**Exhibit B-1: Individuals Consulted**

<b>Individual</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Role in Study</b>
Mary Farrell	MEF Associates	Senior Advisor
Michelle Wood	Abt Associates	Senior Advisor
Lauren Dunton	Abt Associates	Project Director
Robin Koralek	Abt Associates	Project Quality Advisor
Rachel Cook	Abt Associates	Site Visit Task Leader
Carli Wulff	Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation	Project Officer
Lauren Deutsch	Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation/Business Strategy Consultants	Study staff
Kathleen Moore	Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation/ Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison	Study staff
Kate Probert	NASTA	Expert on TANF policy
Sharon McDonald	National Alliance to End Homelessness	Expert on homelessness
Elizabeth Lower-Basch	Center for Law and Social Policy	Expert on TANF policy
LaDonna Pavetti	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	Expert on TANF policy

The individuals listed in Exhibit B-2 will be involved in data collection and analyzing data:

**Exhibit B-2: Data Collection and Analysis Staff**

<b>Individual</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Role in Study</b>
Mary Farrell	MEF Associates	Senior Advisor
Michelle Wood	Abt Associates	Senior Advisor
Robin Koralek	Abt Associates	Project Quality Advisor
Lauren Dunton	Abt Associates	Project Director
Rachel Cook	Abt Associates	Site Visit Task Leader
Asaph Glosser	MEF Associates	Field Work Team Member