

**Attachment C:
Discussion Guide for Staff at CoC/Partner Organizations**

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Introduction to Discussion Guides

Introduction: *We are from the research firm Abt Associates and we are conducting a study, “How TANF Agencies Support Families Experiencing Homelessness,” on behalf of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Abt is conducting a study about how TANF agencies are currently assisting their recipients in avoiding or exiting homelessness.*

As part of that study, we are talking with staff at [name of TANF program/agency] and others who work with TANF recipients to learn more about your approach in identifying and serving households experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. This could include the coordination of service provision between your TANF office and local homeless service providers or any approaches to integrating housing and employment interventions. Your participation in this study is important and will help us understand more about the services provided to TANF recipients to help them avoid or exit homelessness.

Before beginning our discussion, we want to thank you for agreeing to talk with us today. We know you are very busy during this time and will try to be as focused as possible. The interview will take about 90 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and there are no penalties for choosing not to take part in the interview. 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. Your answers will be kept private to the extent permissible by law. However, because of the relatively small number of agencies 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 other staff at your program or agency. 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.

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Do you have any questions before we begin?

Discussion Guide for Staff at CoC/Partner Organizations

Background

1. What is your role at [*name of CoC office or homeless service provider*]?
2. How long have you been with [*name of CoC office or homeless service provider*]?
3. (*Counselors/Case Managers only*) What is your average caseload?

Program and Community Context

4. Can you talk a little about the role of your organization? Scope of services?
5. (*Managers Only*) What is the general structure of this organization? [*Probe: how many staff work here, what are their roles?*] (*Note: If they have an organizational chart, ask to see it/take a copy with you*)
6. What population does your CoC/program serve (e.g., individuals, families, unaccompanied youth, victims of domestic violence)?
 - How do you work with these populations?
7. Does your CoC prioritize assisting homeless families over other populations? If so, can you explain how the priority is implemented?
8. How has the scope of services changed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic? [*Probe: extent and duration of state shutdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, process for restarting the economy, any social distancing requirements*]

Identifying TANF-eligible families

9. Please provide an overview of a family's flow through the CoC, beginning with the initial referral and through assignment to housing assistance program activities and services.
 - How are clients referred to the CoC? [*Note: Ask during first interview at each provider – then do not need to repeat*]
 - Describe the first meeting with the provider - goals/type/setting/structure (e.g., overview or orientation).
 - Which staff members are involved? Who does the client talk to first, second, third? Who is their main point of contact?
 - Does your CoC participate in a coordinated entry process? [*Note: Ask during first interview at each provider – then do not need to repeat*]
 - To what extent have referral processes changed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

10. How do you identify families that might be eligible for TANF benefits? At what point in the process does the referral occur?
 - Do most families apply for TANF prior to entering your program? If yes, do you know at what point they applied for TANF? If no, do you know when they would apply for TANF?
11. What assessments are completed to determine the needs and barriers of clients? At what point does the assessment occur (e.g., application, orientation, intake meeting, etc.)? *[Probe: any assessment for housing need, changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?]*
12. What is your approach to case management? *[Probe: how often do you meet with families? where do meetings occur (e.g., in person, over the phone, changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic)?]*

Serving TANF-eligible families

13. We're interested in better understanding the different types of services provided through the CoC. Can you please describe the range of services available to clients? *[Probe: cash assistance, supportive services, employment programs, etc.]*
14. What types of housing assistance services, in particular, do you provide that are supported with TANF funding? *[Probe: short-term rental or mortgage assistance, emergency assistance, diversion assistance, security and utility payments, moving assistance, motel and hotel vouchers (emergency shelter), case management services, financial and credit counseling, legal services, housing search and placement services, administrative costs associated with these activities]*
15. For each of the housing services you mentioned:
 - What are the eligibility criteria?
 - Who provides the service? Does the TANF program provide the services directly? Are referrals made to another program that is supported by TANF funds?
 - How did your program decide which housing services to offer? Do individual offices make connections to local providers or is it a more centralized process?
 - Are any of these services combined together with local CoC-funded services?
16. What staff members take the lead in providing housing assistance within your organization?
17. Has there been any change in these roles since this program began?

18. What additional housing assistance do your clients need beyond what is currently offered if any? To what extent have the needs of your clients changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? *[Probe: economic implications of the pandemic vs. health problems]* Could TANF funds support any of these additional needs?
19. What is the length of assistance for housing assistance under this program? Once the time limits are exhausted, do you help the household in securing other housing assistance if needed? To what extent has this changed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Coordination with TANF Agency

20. Do you have a formal or informal relationship with the local TANF agency to assist families currently or at-risk of experiencing homelessness?
 - If yes, how long has this relationship been in place?
21. Does this partnership remove barriers that may exist for TANF families needing housing assistance? If yes, describe the barriers.
22. Do TANF recipients receive any type of priority for services?
23. What is the referral process for TANF recipients to receive housing assistance through your program? *[Probe: phone call, email, shared forms, single worker, OWRA]*
24. Does the TANF counselor/caseworker coordinate with your program staff after initial referral for housing assistance? In what way? *[Probe: shared staff, regular meetings]*
25. To what extent do you share information with your local TANF agency? Specifically:
 - Would you know if your client was a TANF recipient?
 - Would you know if your client was a sanctioned TANF recipient, (e.g., if they had not complied with TANF work or other requirements, such as child support enforcement)?
 - If yes, how would you respond? If a client was a noncompliant TANF recipient, would it affect their access to housing or other services through this program?
26. How have these services and/or partnerships changed in the last few years?
27. Moving forward, are there any plans to change the process for providing services to TANF households or the types of services offered? *[Probe: changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic]*

Perceived Benefits and Challenges of Approach

28. Do you think the partnership between *[name of TANF office]* and *[CoC/name of homelessness program(s)]* is benefitting your clients (e.g., able to help families get and stay housed)? In what ways? Why or why not?

29. What would you change about your partnership with *[name of TANF program]*? What is working well? Why? *[Probe: adequate communication between TANF office staff and homeless program staff; any duplication of services or case management]*

30. What would you tell someone else who is trying to implement this approach in another location? What would you recommend? What would you change? *[Probe: different partnership structure; more or less staff; need additional services; training]*