

1300 SAMPLING PLAN REQUIREMENTS

The sampling plan serves as the foundation for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) review of the integrity of the State agency's and Tribal grantee's TANF sampling procedures and SSP-MOE sampling procedures. The State or Tribe that elects to submit case record information for a sample of families (also known as, cases) must select its TANF sample (and, if applicable, SSP-MOE sample) for data reporting purposes under a sampling plan approved by the ACF TANF Manager. All sampling procedures used by the State agency or Tribal grantee, including frame composition and construction, must be fully documented and available for review by the ACF Regional Office. This requirement includes all data processing specifications and automated routines used to select the samples.

The sampling plan documentation must describe the list(s) of families from which the samples are selected, the sample selection procedures, and the methodology for estimating caseload characteristics and sampling errors. Referencing sub-sections of this manual in the sampling plan does not constitute acceptable compliance with the requirements set forth for sampling plan documentation without further explication of the specific procedures the State or the Tribe will use. Detailed descriptions of the sample frames, sample selection, and estimation procedures used by the State or Tribe must be included in the sampling plan documentation.

If a State or Tribe opts to report the required case record information for a sample of families (as opposed to for the entire caseload), a State shall have an approved sampling plan in effect for a full sample period. A State or Tribe may not implement a new sample design without prior approval. A revised sampling plan must be submitted to the ACF Regional Administrator with specific documentation of any substantive modification of a previously approved sample design at least 60 days before the start of the annual sample period, i.e., no later than August 1. The State is not required to resubmit the sampling plan if it is unchanged from the previous year. Changes in random start numbers, sample intervals, or caseload estimates are not to be submitted as a revision of the sampling plan. They should, however, be sent to the ACF Regional Office.

1310 Criteria for Plan Approval

The sampling plan must meet the following criteria:

1. Conformance to principles of probability sampling, i.e., each case (family) in the population must have a known, non-zero probability of selection and computational methods of estimation must lead to a unique estimate;

2. Documentation of methods for constructing and maintaining the sample frame(s), including assessment of frame completeness and any potential problems associated with using the sample frame(s);
3. Documentation of methods for selecting the sample cases from the sample frame(s); and
4. Documentation of methods for estimating case characteristics and their sampling errors, including the computation of weights, where appropriate.

1320 Sample Frame

Samples are selected from a list of families called a "sample frame." The sampling plan must describe in detail the master file, the payroll file, or other list(s) from which the sample of families is actually selected. The plan must explicitly describe the following sample frame characteristics:

1. Date(s) when the sample cases (both regular and supplemental, if applicable) for the sample month are selected, e.g., first workday of the month following the sample month);
2. Source, components, accuracy, and completeness of the sample frame in relation to the total caseload; if not accurate or complete, explanation of why not and how State (Tribe) plans to correct for the problems with the sample frame;
3. Procedures for ensuring that the sample frame contains complete coverage of the applicable caseload (e.g., the active TANF sample frame include all families receiving assistance under the State's or Tribe's TANF Program, including all newly approved applicants for the sample month and the closed TANF sample frame includes all families no longer receiving assistance under the State's TANF Program, i.e., assistance terminated effective for the sample month);
4. Whether or not the frame is constructed by combining more than one list (if more than one list, explanation of how lists are identified and how duplication of cases on lists are prevented);
5. Whether the frame is compiled entirely in the State office, entirely in local offices, in the State office based on information supplied by local offices, etc.;

6. Form of the frame, e.g., a computer file, microfilm, hard copy; OR OTHER (specify), if parts of the frame are in different forms, specifications for each part;
7. Frequency and length of delays and method used in updating the frame or its sources;
8. Procedures for estimating the proportion of sample cases for which the State (Tribe) will not be able to collect and report case record information (e.g., dropped as "listed-in-error" because the family (case) did not receive TANF assistance for the reporting month);
9. Methods of locating and deleting "listed-in-error" cases from the frame;
10. Structure of the frame, i.e., the order of cases within each list and the data elements on the frame, including definitions of coded values;
11. Treatment of special populations under TANF (e.g., individuals under a tribal family assistance plan, a non-custodial parent who participates in work activities); and
12. Criteria for stratifying sample (if applicable).

1330 Sample Selection Procedures

The sampling plan must describe in detail the procedures for selecting the sample cases. The plan must explicitly describe the following characteristics:

1. Procedures for estimation of caseload size, if applicable to sampling method;
2. Procedures for determination of an appropriate allowance for sample cases for which the review may not be complete because the sample case was "listed-in-error" (e.g., family did not receive TANF assistance for the sample month);
3. Procedures for determining the required monthly sample size and indication of the sample size;
4. If stratified sample design is used, procedures for sample allocation;
5. Procedures for the computation of sample intervals and the determination of

random starts if the State (Tribe) used systematic random sampling or stratified systematic random sampling;

6. Application of selection procedures to identify sample cases;
7. Procedures to compensate for excessive oversampling or undersampling;
and
8. Time schedule for each step in the sampling procedure.