

TABLET PROVIDERS AND PROGRAM PARTNERS INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction/Informed Consent for Tablet Providers and Program Partners

Before we begin, I want to tell you a few things about this study and your participation. Please feel free to ask me any questions you might have.

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

The Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (ACF/OPRE) has contracted with Urban to conduct a study of COVID-19 changes to TANF policy and practice in [STATE]. The study is not an audit or evaluation of any program. Rather, the purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of how COVID-19 related changes to TANF policy and practice were implemented in one state, and how those changes were experienced by TANF recipients from different racial and ethnic groups.

As part of this process, we are talking with a small number of program partners, providers, and staff. We would like to speak with you to better understand the work you do, and specifics about the structure and implementation of your programming or services.

You can expect this discussion to last no more than 60 minutes, although we may want to contact you following the discussion to request clarification. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can choose not to participate, skip any questions you would prefer not to answer, or end the discussion at any time without penalty.

Though we take notes and may – with your permission – record this conversation, information is never shared outside of our research team that identifies you or any other people we interview by name. When we write our reports and discuss our findings, we present information aggregated from across our discussions in order to shield the identities of individual people. However, if you are in a position that makes it so that you are the only person who could know a certain piece of information, it is possible someone reading a report might infer the source of the information. We make every effort to avoid this, but you should be aware of the possibility.

Everyone who works on this study has signed a Staff Confidentiality Pledge prohibiting disclosure of anything you say during the discussion that would allow someone outside the study team to identify you.

[IF VIRTUAL] But, please understand that given technical limitations with zoom and similar internet platforms, we cannot guarantee the confidentiality of what might be said. Also, we ask that you please

participate in a private setting away from earshot or viewing by other people to include family members.

[IF VIRTUAL OR IN-PERSON] The risks associated with participating in this discussion are minimal. This discussion will be focused on your role, and you will not be asked to disclose any personal or sensitive information. *We hope you will speak frankly about your work and perspectives, which we understand can be sensitive information that could impose risks if revealed. We want to assure you that we will make every effort to protect the privacy of the information you share.*

Since this interview is taking place in-person, the research team has taken proper precautions to minimize the risk of COVID-19 infection but cannot eliminate all risk of exposure. All research team members are fully vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19 and have taken COVID-19 tests prior to traveling to [STATE]. To try to make this a comfortable space for everyone, we are wearing masks. Masks are optional for you.

Would you prefer for us to wear masks during this conversation?

Program partners will receive no direct benefits for participating in the study. However, there is the opportunity to inform [state TANF office] on how to identify and mitigate potential racial and ethnic disparities in their programs in the future.

If you are comfortable, we would also like to record the conversation. The recordings being made are only for our own notes and will be destroyed at the termination of the project. We also ask that you refrain from sharing anything we discuss today with others outside this interview to help us ensure your privacy.

Finally, I would like to remind you that participation is completely voluntary.

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY?

DO YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY?

DO YOU AGREE TO BE RECORDED?

If you have questions or concerns about the study, please contact: Marla McDaniel, Urban Institute, 202-261-5678, mmcdaniel@urban.org

If you agree to participate in this study and feel that your rights have been violated or that you have not been treated fairly, contact: Office of Human Research Protections, The Urban Institute, 500 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Washington, DC 20024 / (202-261-5632)

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 0970-0597 and it expires 10/31/2025.

I. Background and Context

1. Please describe your organization and your role. (Probe: What is your job title? How long have you held this role? Listen for before/during the pandemic.)
2. What is your organization's relationship with the TANF program and the Department of Social Services? (Probe: Formal and informal partnerships, knowledge of TANF program)
3. [For organizations contracted with the TANF program] What services do you provide, and which are virtual, or have a virtual options?
 - a. How easy or difficult has it been for families to engage in the virtual services?
 - b. What hurdles have you noticed, if any? (Probe: spotty access, lack of devices, not knowing how to use devices, other issues not related to internet)
 - i. How pervasive are the hurdles? Do they affect most families, less than half of families, or very few families? (Probe: Characteristics of families with the most trouble accessing virtual services)

II. Tablet Program

I would like to ask some questions about the tablet program in [STATE] to understand the implementation of the program, challenges and successes, and any emerging outcomes.

1. [For organizations directly involved in the tablet program] Tell us about your organization's role in the tablet program, your motivation for providing the program, and how the partnership with [STATE] TANF came about. (Probe: How they became contractors for the federal program, how the funding works, prior experience working with TANF and low-income families).
2. [For organizations directly involved in the tablet program] Tell us about the program's implementation when it was first rolled out and in its early months. (Probe: Variations in implementation by location, unique challenges or successes by location, differences by race and ethnicity)
 - a. What kind of feedback have you received so far?
 - b. What are your goals for the program? What would be an indicator of success? Are you collecting any data or metrics? (Probe: Any collection of demographic information on participants)

III. Capacity and Fairness of the Tablet Program

[For organizations directly involved in the tablet program] Now I would like to turn now to some questions about the tablet program and its capacity to meet families' needs.

[For organizations contracted with the TANF program] The [STATE] TANF program has a formal agreement with a wireless internet provider [Name of provider] to provide eligible TANF participants

access to the Affordable Connectivity Program, which provides qualifying households with low cost internet access and tablet or other device (e.g., phone, laptop). Our next questions are about the tablet program and its capacity to meet families' needs.

1. *[For organizations contracted with the TANF program]* Have you heard about the tablet program?
 - a. *If yes*, probe on what they have heard about the program and whether they have known TANF clients who have used it.
 - b. *If no* skip to question 6 below

2. Do you think the program is generally fair and available to all who need it?

3. Are there some people who have a harder time getting and receiving tablets than others? (*If yes: Who has a harder time, in your experience?*)

4. What kinds of circumstances might make it harder for some to access the program?

5. Do you think people of different races and ethnicities have similar or different experiences with accessing tablets in [STATE]??
 - a. *If different*, have you observed any differences, and can you give me an example of what you've seen?
 - i. Why do you think that difference is happening?

6. When you think of families needing tablets or other devices to access internet in [STATE]], do you tend to see differences in the types of needs or the level of needs for families of different races and ethnicities? What are some of the differences you've seen?
 - b. *[if familiar with the tablet program]* *If you see differences*, in your opinion how well does the tablet program respond to those differences?
 - i. If not as well as it should, what do you think are some of the challenges? What solutions would you recommend, if any?
 - c. *[if not familiar with the tablet program]* *If you see differences*, in your opinion how, what solutions would you recommend, if any?

IV. Wrap-Up

Thank you so much for taking the time to share this information with us. We sincerely hope that this study can be useful to you. Before we finish, we would like to hear what you would most like others to know about your experiences with TANF during the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual services and what you might like to learn from our study when it is completed.

1. Is there anything you may immediately think of that you would most like to learn from this study when it is finished?

Is there anything else you would like to share with us?