

Instrument 2A

Talking Circle Facilitator's Guide – Data Needs Assessment (In-Person)

I. FACILITATOR PREPARATION

Facilitator Background: This section includes background for facilitators only to review in preparation for the Talking Circle. All Talking Circles will be led by AI/AN facilitators who bring cultural understanding, relational respect, and community connection to the process.

As a facilitator, you will play a key role in creating a space that is inclusive, nonjudgmental, and grounded in shared Indigenous values. Your goal is to ensure that all voices are honored and that each participant has the opportunity to speak, reflect, and be heard in a way that feels safe and respectful. While conversation should flow naturally, you may gently guide the discussion to maintain balance and ensure equitable participation.

Key Facilitator Responsibilities:

- Foster open dialogue while respecting participants' autonomy.
- Use a talking stick (or another culturally appropriate item) to manage turn-taking.
 - For the initial round the talking stick or signifier will be passed from one person to the next, as participants introduce themselves and share a bit about their relationship to the TANF program. After the initial round, participants will ask for the talking stick, by raising their hand, when they have something they would like to share.
- Model respectful listening and reflective facilitation.
 - As a knowledge gatherer in this talking circle, you should act as participant-expert. The goal is to open up dialog rather than steer the conversation in a pre-determined direction. Remember that the knowledge holders participating may have other issues that they believe are important to discuss. However, you can share prompts with the group should there be moments where no one has anything else to say and you want to initiate more learning.

Materials to Bring:

- Sage or other medicine for optional smudging.
- Talking stick or culturally appropriate object for turn-taking.
- The study team will provide you with a recording device (for notetaking purposes only).

Participant Composition:

- 1 Talking Circle includes up to 8 participants.
- Participants include Tribal TANF program leaders and Tribal TANF staff.

Important Reminders:

- Participation is voluntary.
- All participants must provide a verbal “yes” to consent to participate.
- No personal information will be shared.
- Encourage privacy and respect for shared stories. The study team is free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.
- Allow participants to guide conversation content as much as possible.

II. OPENING THE CIRCLE

Facilitator Instructions: please distribute the consent form, then read the text in quotations to guide the Talking Circle, referring to the guidelines above if you need assistance.

1. Welcome and Purpose:

“Welcome.

This Talking Circle is being conducted as part of the Next Steps for Tribal TANF Research and Data project. The Next Steps for Tribal TANF Research and Data project aims to hear directly from American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) communities about their experiences with Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Tribal TANF). The project team is speaking with Tribal TANF knowledge holders to gather information about what is going well, what is challenging, and recommendations for future directions for Tribal TANF research and data.

The project team includes MEF Associates (MEF), Kauffman and Associates (KAI), and consultants. MEF is a small company that works to improve the lives of children and families through research and program assistance. KAI is an American Indian-owned consulting firm that supports AIAN people and communities. The consultants are Dr. Geni Cowan, Dr. Jose Chavez, and Dr. Heather Sauyaq Jean Gordon, who have experience working directly with Tribal communities and Tribal TANF programs. The project is sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

This Talking Circle is to learn about your experiences with Tribal TANF, and to gather insights that can help shape future research, data collection, and program improvements. We are speaking to you today to learn from your wisdom and understand your perspective about Tribal TANF.

This Talking Circle will last approximately two hours. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may skip any questions, and you may end your participation at any time. If you are a Tribal TANF participant, your decision to participate in this study or to not participate will not affect your benefits in any way, now or in the future.”

2. OMB Statement:

“A government agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The OMB number for this information collection is XXXX-XXXX, expiring XX/XX/XXXX.”

3. Privacy and Recording:

“We ask that what is shared in the circle remains in the circle to promote trust and openness. The information you share will be kept private and we will not use your name or any personal details in project reports. The information you share will be combined with what we hear from others. You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer, and you can stop your participation at any time.

We would like to audio-record this conversation to make sure we have an accurate record of what we discuss. The recording will be stored on an encrypted, secure server. The project team will only use the recording to

check our notes and then the recording will be destroyed. We will begin audio-recording after our opening and introductions.

The document we shared includes all of the information we just discussed, and it also includes project contact information in case you have any questions about your rights as a participant in the project.

Do you have any questions about the Next Steps for Tribal TANF Research and Data project or today's talking circle?"

4. Consent:

Facilitator Instructions: Allow participants time to review the consent form (Appendix G) after distributing it to them. Then ask:

"Are you willing to continue with this talking circle?

Are you comfortable with the talking circle being audio recorded for note-taking purposes?"

At this point, respondents can respond "yes" or "no."

If all respondents agree to be recorded, begin recording.

If any respondent does not consent to being audio recorded, do not record, and instead take digital notes on a study team encrypted laptop.

Once the recording has started, ask again for permission to record so that consent is recorded.

Can you please repeat that we have your permission to record?

At this point, the respondents can again respond "yes."

5. Talking Circle Guidelines:

- o "As we share this space together, please keep the following guidelines in mind:
 1. Respect the talking piece so the person who has it can convey their full message without interruption.
 2. When you don't have the talking piece, listen respectfully and reflect upon, consider, and honor the meaning of what others say so you can build on the conversation.
 3. During the first round of sharing, we will pass the talking stick around the circle. You can pass during this time if you need to. Nonverbal communication and silence sometimes say more than words.
 4. Please turn your cell phone and devices to vibrate or mute so as not to interrupt others. We understand emergencies may arise. If needed, please take any calls in another room.
 5. Speak for yourself and from your own experiences and perspectives. Use "I" language and not generic "people think..." or sweeping generalizations like "people want..." language.
 6. Be courageous, honest, and open with your own stories. Speak your truth from your heart and be open to hearing others' truths.
 7. Listen from the heart, allowing what others say to move you. Bear witness but avoid giving advice or arguing with others. Each of us is an expert on our own life experiences.
 8. Honor what others say with confidentiality and integrity, sharing only with context and in relevance to your own life and learning."

6. Prayer or Song:

- o "Would anyone like to offer words, a prayer, or a song to open the circle in a good way?"
 1. Note: If no one volunteers, offer a respectful acknowledgement of the circle opening. Set a tone of respect and appreciation for their time and knowledge, the land you are on, and the guidance and accompaniment ancestors are providing.

7. Facilitator Introduction:

- o Briefly introduce yourselves as facilitators, modeling 2-3 minute introductions. Include your name, Tribe, title, and role on the project.

8. Participant Introductions:

- o Invite participants to introduce themselves and share their name, Tribe, and relationship to the Tribal TANF program.
- o Pass the talking stick around the circle to start introductions.

III. CONDUCTING THE TALKING CIRCLE

Facilitator Instructions: BEGIN AUDIO RECORDING AT THIS POINT. Read the text in quotations to guide the Talking Circle, referring to the guidelines above if you need assistance.

“Thank you all for being with me today in this space. We may now begin our discussion. I will read the first question and then pass the talking stick (or object) to the first person who would wish to share. After they are done sharing, if you wish to share, please indicate and the talking stick (or object) will be passed to you.”

Questions for Facilitation

Section 1: Needs and experiences related to Tribal TANF data collection, use, and reporting

“We would like to talk about your needs and experiences related to Tribal TANF data collection, use, and reporting. Would anyone like to share?”

Probes:

1. *How would you define the term “data” in your Tribal TANF program? What does the term “data” mean to you?*
2. *What successes have you experienced related to Tribal TANF data?*
3. *What challenges have you encountered related to Tribal TANF data?*

Section 2: Resources and Support

"Now we would like to hear about the resources that helped your program succeed, and what support you would like to see in the future. Would anyone like to share?"

Probes:

4. *What kinds of data support from ACF and OFA have been most helpful for your Tribal TANF program?*
5. *What kinds of data support would you like to see more of from ACF and OFA?*

Section 3: Opportunities for Improvement

"Now we would like to hear about opportunities for improvement related to Tribal TANF data. Would anyone like to share?"

Probes:

6. *Are there opportunities for using data in new or different ways to support Tribal TANF participants and Tribal TANF programs?*

Section 4: Ensuring this study is responsive and beneficial to Tribal communities and Tribal TANF programs

"As mentioned earlier, this study is meant to help shape the future of Tribal TANF research, data technical assistance, and related programs. Would anyone like to share?"

Probes:

7. *How can this study be useful and helpful for Tribal TANF programs and the people they serve?*
8. *How would you like us to share updates and future results from this project with you?*

IV. CLOSING THE CIRCLE

Facilitator Script:

"Thank you for sharing your time and knowledge with us today in this space. We truly value each of your perspectives and we are committed to using what we have learned today to support you and your communities through the Tribal TANF

program. The project team will keep in contact with any project updates that may be of interest to you and as they begin to publish findings. Thank you again!

Would anyone like to close our time together in a good way?"

Note: if there are no volunteers, the facilitator may provide the closing.