

Next Steps for Tribal TANF Research and Data

OMB Information Collection Request 0970 - New Collection

Supporting Statement Part B

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Type of Request: New

Submitted By:
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Administration for Children and Families
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**Alternative Supporting Statement for Information Collections Designed for
Research, Public Health Surveillance, and Program Evaluation Purposes**

Part B

B1. Objectives

Objectives

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is conducting the Next Steps for Tribal TANF Research and Data project to gather systematic information directly from Tribal TANF program leaders, staff, and participants about (1) their challenges, successes, and support needs related to Tribal TANF data reporting requirements; and (2) their research and evidence needs related to Tribal TANF program operations. Activities include gathering information on programs' needs and experiences – both overall and specifically related to Tribal TANF data collection, use, and reporting – as well as their technical assistance needs and their priority learning questions. ACF will use this information to inform future changes to Tribal TANF data reporting requirements and revisions to accompanying guidance (for example, to improve clarity and address inconsistencies in data definitions), as well as improvements to data-related technical assistance provided to Tribal TANF grantees. The goal is to thoughtfully mitigate a long-standing burdensome requirement into a more efficient and sustainable data collection process that yields reliable and higher-quality information actionable to both Tribal TANF programs, to inform program operations, and ACF in monitoring program compliance and performance. Additionally, the information will be used to inform future OPRE-sponsored research activities so that they yield information that enables Tribal TANF programs to engage in evidence-informed decision-making around program implementation to ultimately serve their communities better and improve participant outcomes. Although the proposed activities align with the Administration's priority to support trust and treaty obligations with Tribal Nations, we do not intend for this information to be used as the principal basis for public policy decisions. ACF has contracted with MEF Associates (MEF) and its subcontractor Kauffman and Associates (KAI) to conduct this study.

As noted in Supporting Statement A (SSA), the study research questions (RQ) are:

- RQ1. What are the characteristics of Tribal TANF programs?
- RQ2. What are successes, challenges, and opportunities experienced by Tribal TANF programs?
- RQ3. What are Tribal TANF programs' needs and experiences related to TANF data collection, use, and reporting?
- RQ4. What recommendations do Tribal TANF programs have for next steps for Tribal TANF research and data?
- RQ5. How can we ensure this study is responsive and beneficial to tribal communities and Tribal TANF programs?

To answer these questions, the study proposes to use a mixed-methods data collection approach including:

- **Talking circles** with Tribal leaders and Tribal TANF program leaders about their needs and experiences related to Tribal TANF (RQ2, RQ4, RQ5) (Instrument 1))
- **Talking circles** with Tribal TANF program leaders and staff about their needs and experiences related to Tribal TANF data (RQ3, RQ4, RQ5) (Instrument 2)
- A web-based **survey** administered to each of the 76 federally recognized Tribal TANF programs to ask about their needs and experiences related to TANF data collection, use, and reporting (RQ1, RQ3, RQ4) (Instrument 3)
- In-person **knowledge sharing visits** to up to five Tribal TANF programs, that will include:

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- o **onsite interviews** with Tribal TANF program leaders about their needs and experiences related to Tribal TANF and their perspective on future directions for Tribal TANF research and data (RQ2, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5) (Instrument 4)
- o **onsite interviews** with Tribal TANF data staff about their needs and experiences related to Tribal TANF data (RQ3, RQ4) (Instrument 5)
- o **onsite observations** of data entry processes to gain a deeper understanding of current practices related to Tribal TANF data collection, use, and reporting (RQ3) (Instrument 6)
- o **onsite talking circles** with Tribal TANF staff about their needs and experiences related to Tribal TANF and their perspective on future directions for Tribal TANF research and data (RQ2, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5) (Instrument 7)
- o **onsite talking circles** with Tribal TANF participants to elevate participant voice in our understanding of Tribal TANF strengths, challenges, and opportunities (RQ2, RQ4) (Instrument 8)

Generalizability of Results

While we have designed our data collection to maximize the opportunity for leaders and staff from each of the 76 federally recognized Tribal TANF programs to provide input, the study is not designed to promote statistical generalization.

Appropriateness of Study Design and Methods for Planned Uses

The goal of this study is to gather systematic information directly from Tribal TANF program leaders, staff, and participants about (1) their challenges, successes, and support needs related to Tribal TANF data reporting requirements; and (2) their research and evidence needs related to Tribal TANF program operations. Given that objective, we have designed our data collection to maximize the opportunity for leaders and staff from each of the 76 federally recognized Tribal TANF programs to provide input. However, we will not use the data to make statistical inferences or generalize findings beyond the study sample. Additionally, the study is descriptive and does not include an impact study; therefore, findings from the study should not be used to assess outcomes of individuals who participate in Tribal TANF or impacts of the Tribal TANF program. All products associated with the study will include these limitations in the discussion of findings.

As noted in SSA, this information is not intended to be used as the principal basis for public policy decisions and is not expected to meet the threshold of influential or highly influential scientific information.

B2. Methods and Design

Target Population

The target populations for this study include Tribal leaders, Tribal TANF program leaders and staff, and Tribal TANF participants. The target populations and estimated sample size for each data component are detailed below.

- o **Talking circles focused on knowledge development** (Instrument 1). We will collect information from up to 32 Tribal leaders and Tribal TANF program leaders (four talking circles, up to 8 participants per circle)

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- o **Talking circles focused on data needs assessment** (Instrument 2). We will collect information from up to 48 Tribal TANF program leaders and staff (six talking circles, up to 8 participants per circle).
- o **Survey** (Instrument 3). The survey will be sent to Tribal TANF program directors, who may collaborate with their staff on the response. We will collect one survey response from each of the 76 federally recognized Tribal TANF program, for up to 76 responses. The unit of analysis will be the Tribal TANF program.
- o **Knowledge sharing visits**. We will conduct up to five in-person knowledge sharing site visits. For each of the up to five Tribal TANF programs selected for site visits, the project team will collect information from program leadership, staff, and participants.
 - o **Onsite interviews with Tribal TANF program leaders** (Instrument 4). We will collect information from up to 10 Tribal TANF program leaders (five sites, average of two per site).
 - o **Onsite interviews with Tribal TANF data staff** (Instrument 5). We will collect information from up to 10 Tribal TANF data staff (five sites, average of two per site).
 - o **Onsite observations of data entry processes** (Instrument 6). We will observe up to 10 Tribal TANF staff who work with Tribal TANF data (five sites, average of two per site).
 - o **Onsite talking circles with Tribal TANF staff** (Instrument 7). We will collect information from up to 40 Tribal TANF staff (five sites, one talking circle per site, up to 8 participants per talking circle).
 - o **Onsite talking circles with Tribal TANF participants** (Instrument 8). We will collect information from up to 40 Tribal TANF program participants (five sites, one talking circle per site, up to 8 participants per talking circle).

Respondent Recruitment and Site Selection

Talking Circles and Survey

The **talking circles** (Instrument 1 and Instrument 2) will be open to representatives of all 76 federally recognized Tribal TANF programs and the **survey** (Instrument 3) will be administered to the directors of all 76 programs. For these data collection components, we hope to engage respondents from as many of the 76 federally recognized Tribal TANF programs as possible. Our starting point will be a list of contact information for points of contact at the 76 federally recognized Tribal TANF programs provided to the project team by ACF's Office of Family Assistance (OFA). The project team will use this list to send invitations to **talking circles** (see Appendices C and D), and to send out links to complete the **survey** (see Appendices E and F). The text of Appendices C, D, E and F may also be used as phone scripts.

For the **talking circles focused on knowledge development** we will additionally work with the Active Engagement Workgroup (AEW) and our project team to generate a list of Tribal Leaders to invite. As described in SSA, the Active Engagement Workgroup is a small advisory group (fewer than ten people) that includes Tribal TANF leaders and staff. These Tribal Leaders will be invited using a recruitment email (see Appendix C). The text of Appendix C may also be used as a phone script.

Given that the primary goal of this study is to hear directly from AIAN communities about their experiences with Tribal TANF, our recruitment strategy for these study components is designed to promote inclusion by maximizing the opportunity for leaders and staff from each of the 76 federally recognized Tribal TANF programs to provide input.

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Recruitment and Site Selection for Knowledge Sharing Visits

For the **knowledge sharing visits** we will purposively select up to five Tribal TANF programs that represent a range of variation across key dimensions (e.g. program size, program maturity, program geography, program governance structure). We will consult closely with federal partners and the study's Active Engagement Workgroup to identify Tribal TANF programs for knowledge sharing visits that provide an opportunity to learn about a range of program contexts.

In preparation for each visit, we will work closely with program leadership to identify appropriate respondents for the **onsite interviews with Tribal TANF program leaders** (Instrument 4), **onsite interviews with Tribal TANF data staff** (Instrument 5), **onsite observations of data entry processes** (Instrument 6), and **onsite talking circles with Tribal TANF staff** (Instrument 7). For the interviews and observations, we will ask program leaders to select staff who can best respond to the topics of the protocols, based on their roles. For the talking circle with staff, we will ask program leaders to select staff who represent a range of roles across the organization. We will also ask program leaders to recruit Tribal TANF participants for the **onsite talking circles with Tribal TANF participants** (Instrument 8). We assume that each Tribal TANF program participating in a site visit will take an individualized approach to recruiting participants based on program and community characteristics and cultural norms. We will work with program leaders to provide individualized support for participant recruitment. Talking circle participants will not necessarily represent the range of characteristics of the programs' clients as a whole.

Recruitment considerations for all study components

For all study components, recruitment emails will come from study subcontractor Kauffman and Associates, Inc, an American Indian-owned firm that is well known in Indian Country. To further promote trust and engagement, we will also provide an email for trusted contacts – including OFA staff, AEW members, and members of the National Congress of American Indians Tribal TANF Task Force – to send to Tribal TANF staff encouraging them to respond to the project team's outreach (Appendix A). Appendix A may also be used as a phone script. We will also share a document with answers to Frequently Asked Questions about the study (Appendix B).

B3. Design of Data Collection Instruments

Development of Data Collection Instruments

The project team developed the data collection instruments to meet the objectives of the study and answer the research questions. As described throughout SSA and SSB, each instrument is designed to get input on specific research questions.

Development of the **survey** was led by project consultants who have Tribal TANF expertise and informed by conversations with AEW members. The survey was pre-tested with 6 Tribal TANF staff members who are members of the AEW. Pre-testing revealed that the survey is an appropriate length and covers topics familiar to Tribal TANF staff. As a result of the pre-testing we made some edits for clarity and revised the response choices for some multiple-choice questions.

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Development of the *talking circle, interview, and observation* instruments was led by project team members with input and review from team members who are expert in Indigenous research methods. The instruments were informed by conversations with the AEW, and AEW members had the opportunity to review the final instruments.

B4. Collection of Data and Quality Control

As mentioned above, ACF has contracted with MEF Associates (MEF) and its subcontractor Kauffman and Associates (KAI) to conduct this study. MEF and KAI staff will be collecting all data for each data component mentioned. Details on recruitment and mode of data collection are detailed for each below.

- o **Talking Circles** (Instrument 1 and Instrument 2). We will reach out via email (Appendix C and Appendix D) to Tribal TANF program directors (contact list provided by OFA). For the talking circles focused on knowledge development, we will additionally work with the AEW and our project team to generate a list of Tribal Leaders to invite. We intend to over-recruit with the goal of including up to 8 participants in each talking circle. If more than 8 potential participants express interest in a circle, we will select participants to maximize diversity among the communities and roles they represent (e.g., a mix of Tribal leaders and Tribal TANF program leaders who represent programs of varied size, maturity, geography, and governance structure). We will hold six virtual talking circles (two focused on knowledge development and four focused on data needs assessment) (via videoconference) and four in-person talking circles at events where Tribal leaders and Tribal TANF program leaders are likely to already be in attendance (two focused on knowledge development and four focused on data needs assessment). Dates and times will be provided in the recruitment email. To build rapport and trust, the talking circle facilitator will be a project team member who is an Indigenous person with experience facilitating talking circles and who is an attentive listener and skilled in creating a safe and welcoming space for authentic conversations. The talking circles will be approximately two hours in length and, with respondent permission, will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. A project team member will also take notes.
- o **Survey** (Instrument 3). We will email Tribal TANF program directors explaining the purpose of the survey (Appendix E). The email will include a link to a web-based survey platform. While the survey will be sent directly to Tribal TANF program directors, directors may collaborate with staff to complete the survey. Each survey will have a unique link, so that multiple staff within the organization can contribute to the survey, but the survey link cannot be shared outside of the organization. While the survey is being fielded, we will spot check responses as they come in to ensure that skip patterns are performing properly and to assess any issues with missing data. We will also monitor within the web-based survey platform the status of each survey (e.g. not started, in progress, completed) and send up to three reminder emails (one per week, for up to three weeks) to any Tribal TANF agencies that have not completed the survey (Appendix F).
- o **Knowledge sharing visits**. The project team will purposively select sites to visit sites that represent variation in terms of dimensions such as program size, program maturity, program geography, and program governance structure. Once Tribal TANF programs have been identified as potential sites for knowledge sharing visits, the project team will reach out to the TANF program director to confirm interest, and work with the TANF program leaders at the site to set up interviews with respondents and create a schedule that minimizes burden on the site while meeting study objectives. When possible, the project team will work with a knowledge gatherer from the community to support data collection. This will be a person who has established relationships with the community and who can assist the project team with understanding community norms and practices, as well as helping ensure that communities feel that the

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research is safe and beneficial. The team will conduct training prior to the knowledge sharing visits, including introducing the protocols and consent forms, the plan for scheduling visits, and logistics such as recording, note-taking, and tokens of appreciation. After each knowledge sharing visit, the visitors will share their experiences and lessons learned with other project team staff, which will inform future visits.

- o **Onsite interviews with Tribal TANF program leaders** (Instrument 4), **onsite interviews with Tribal TANF data staff** (Instrument 5) and **onsite observations of data entry processes** (Instrument 6). The Tribal TANF program leader or site point of contact will select staff for interviews who can best respond to the topics of the protocols, based on their roles. All interviews will be conducted in pairs, with one team member leading the interview and the other team member taking notes. At least one member of the pair will be an Indigenous knowledge gatherer. With the permission of the respondent, the project team will record the interviews to assist with notetaking.
- o **Onsite talking circles with Tribal TANF staff and Tribal TANF participants** (Instrument 7 and Instrument 8). The Tribal TANF program leader or site point of contact will select staff for the talking circle who represent a range of roles across the organization and will recruit Tribal TANF participants for the onsite talking circles with participants. The talking circle facilitator will be a project team member who is an Indigenous person with experience facilitating talking circles and who is an attentive listener and skilled in creating a safe and welcoming space for authentic conversations. Additionally, when possible, we will have a co-facilitator who is a respected community member and has been invited to the talking circle. The talking circles will be approximately two hours in length and, with respondent permission, will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. A project team member will also take notes.

B5. Response Rates and Potential Nonresponse Bias

Response Rates

The data collection instruments are not designed to produce statistically generalizable findings, and participation is wholly at the respondent's discretion. Response rates will not be calculated or reported.

Nonresponse

As participants will not be randomly sampled and findings are not intended to be representative, non-response bias will not be calculated. Respondent demographics will be documented and reported in written materials associated with the data collection.

B6. Production of Estimates and Projections

The data will not be used to generate population estimates, either for internal use or dissemination.

B7. Data Handling and Analysis

Data Handling

For the **survey**, we will use a survey platform that provides real-time logic checks and access to data frequencies that will make data review efficient. After the first phase of data collection, project staff will review data frequencies to make sure the responses remain internally consistent. After data collection has ended, we will further check data frequencies and make logical edits when necessary. We will examine if there are systematic patterns in non-response, and we will recode "other-specify" survey responses into valid response options as appropriate.

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For all **talking circles**, **interviews** and **observations**, we will have both detailed notes as well as audio recordings. Prior to importing the notes into a qualitative software (see discussion below) the project team will ensure that they have a complete and accurate transcription by checking the detailed notes taken during the interview or focus group with the audio recording.

Data Analysis

For closed-ended **survey** questions, we will conduct descriptive analysis, calculating frequencies and means, as appropriate. When the data collection period has ended, we will code open-ended responses (that is, other-specify and open-text responses). A trained analyst will code the qualitative responses, starting with a basic coding scheme that will evolve to capture the major categories and subcategories observed in the data. Once coded, responses will be counted and analyzed descriptively. In addition, anecdotes illustrative of themes may be included in public-facing documents. Neither personal nor program-identifying information will be included in public-facing documents.

For all **talking circles**, **interviews** and **observations**, the guides were developed to answer the key research questions. The research team will fully transcribe audio recordings of interviews and talking circles and clean notes in cases when participants did not consent to being recorded. We will develop a coding scheme to organize the data into themes or topic areas. Transcripts will be coded (tagged based on the theme or topic for which they are relevant) and analyzed using a qualitative analysis software package such as NVivo or Dedoose.

Data Use

This study will produce:

- A report on the findings of the Knowledge Development Activities, focused on findings from the **knowledge development talking circles** as well as the literature review and the knowledge holder interviews. The primary focus of this report will be RQ1. This report is expected to be published by March 2027.
- A report on the findings of the **data needs assessment talking circles**, **survey**, and **knowledge sharing visits**. The primary focus of this report will be RQ2. This report is expected to be published by September 2027.
- A final report that synthesizes findings from the project as a whole (all RQs) and shares options for next steps in Tribal TANF research and data. This report is expected to be published by September 2028.
- The study may also produce other materials that make findings accessible to Tribal TANF programs and community members and other interested audiences, for example briefs summarizing longer reports; webinars; conference presentations; and/or blog posts.

B8. Contact Persons

MEF Project Director
Emily Schmitt

Federal Project Officer
Girley Wright

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Attachments

Instrument 1A: Talking Circle Facilitator's Guide – Knowledge Development (in-person)

Instrument 1B: Talking Circle Facilitator's Guide – Knowledge Development (virtual)

Instrument 2A: Talking Circle Facilitator's Guide – Data Needs Assessment (in-person)

Instrument 2B: Talking Circle Facilitator's Guide – Data Needs Assessment (virtual)

Instrument 3: Tribal TANF Data Needs Assessment Survey

Instrument 4: Knowledge Sharing Visit Interview Protocol – Tribal TANF Program Leaders

Instrument 5: Knowledge Sharing Visit Interview Protocol – Data Staff

Instrument 6: Knowledge Sharing Visit Data Observation (Learning Exchange) Worksheet

Instrument 7: Knowledge Sharing Visit Talking Circle Facilitator's Guide –Staff

Instrument 8: Knowledge Sharing Visit Talking Circle Facilitator's Guide –Participants

Appendix A: Outreach Email for Trusted Contacts

Appendix B: Next Steps Tribal TANF Study Frequently Asked Questions

Appendix C: Recruitment Email for Knowledge Development Talking Circles

Appendix D Recruitment Email for Data Needs Assessment Talking Circles

Appendix E: Recruitment Email for Survey

Appendix F: Follow up Email for the Survey

Appendix G: Informed Consent for Study Participants