

TANF Pilot Evaluation

In-depth participant interview guide

Introduction and Consent

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today—I really appreciate it. My name is [NAME], and I am with an independent research organization called [Mathematica/The Adjacent Possible]. We are here to learn about your experience with [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME].

We are conducting the TANF Pilot Evaluation. This evaluation is funded by the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The evaluation will help us learn about how TANF programs can serve people better. Our conversation will take about 60 to 90 minutes. You will receive a \$60 gift card to thank you for your participation.

Before we start, I want to let you know that your participation in this study is voluntary. You can skip any question or end the discussion at any time without any consequences. Your answers to these questions will not affect your benefits. We are interested in your experience and perspective; there are no right or wrong answers. We know that everyone's experience with [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME] is different. We want to learn about *your* experiences with [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME] and what the program could do to make your experience better.

We will keep your individual responses completely private and use them only for research purposes. We will not share them with anyone outside our study team. We will not share them with the [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME]. We have obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health. This helps us protect participants' privacy. This means no one can force the study team to give out information that identifies them, even in court. The certificate does not prevent us from making disclosures required by law, such as threats of harm or abuse. We will summarize information collected today in future publications. We may use quotes, but we will never include names or link a response to a particular person.

I would like to record our conversation so I don't miss anything. No one will have access or listen to the recording except for people on the study team. All recordings and notes will be stored in a secure network environment maintained by the study team and will be deleted once the study is complete. Is it okay with you if I record this conversation? If you want me to turn the recorder off for any reason or at any time, just say so. *[Interviewer: Turn the recorder on if yes. If no, do not record and take very detailed notes instead.]*

Okay, I have now turned on the recorder. Now that I have the recorder on, do you agree to participate in this interview and have the conversation recorded? *[Interviewer: Get verbal consent on the tape recording.]*

[Interviewer: State your name, the respondent's first name only, the location, and the date.]

<small>PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT OF 1995 (Public Law 104-13) STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BURDEN: Through this information collection, ACF is gathering information to learn more about measuring program performance in TANF programs. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 75 minutes per respondent, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. This is a voluntary</small>

collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB # is 0970-0XXX and the expiration date is XX/XX/XXXX. If you have any comments on this collection of information, please contact Quinn Moore at QMoore@mathematica-mpr.com.

Discussion questions

General instructions for interviewers

This discussion guide is designed to capture the perceptions and experiences of participants involved in the TANF Pilot. It is organized chronologically around five topics to better understand TANF participants' experiences as they move through the TANF program (that is, learning about the TANF program and its requirements, connecting with and participating in the TANF program, etc.). Before the interview, prepopulate the name of the TANF program, state, or other terminology (shown in brackets) using language relevant to the state or pilot. If the participant uses different terminology, use that during the interview instead.

Numbered items indicate the core questions where data must be collected. Italicized text provides probes to help elicit more detail. Select and adapt the probe questions depending on the participant, the state in question, and any state-specific circumstances and the information gathered prior to the interview. Questions marked with an asterisk (*) can be pre-populated or adapted with information from earlier discussions or documents collected about the state. Documents to collect and review prior to the interview include the state pilot application, assessment guide data (OMB # 0970-0356), state TANF plan, staff procedure manuals, participant agreements or policy documents, and participant-facing tools. Use the questions flexibly to guide the discussion based on the responses of the participant. Depending on the flow of conversation, you may not need to ask every question to every participant. If you reach a question and the participant already provided the answer earlier in the interview, you don't need to ask them to repeat that information.

Discussion topics

- A. Background: to create a warm, inviting tone for the discussion that puts the participant at ease.
- B. Experiences with work and school: to gather relevant background about the participant, including understanding if the participant came to the program job-ready or needed help to prepare for work or school. Also to get a pulse on how they see their future and program supports that could be helpful.
- C. Experiences connecting with the TANF program: to learn about their initial impressions of and experiences with the TANF program (particularly in pilots focused on outreach, orientation, or referrals).
- D. Experiences participating in the TANF program: to gather insight into how the TANF program helped – or did not help – the participant prepare for or find work (particularly in pilots focused on employment partnerships or pathways).
- E. Reflections on TANF program experience: to gather overall program perceptions and wrap up the discussion.

A. Background

1. To begin, I have a couple of warm-up questions. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

- *How would you describe yourself? It can be anything that helps me understand who you are.*
- *Tell me a little bit about your family. How many children do you have? Tell me about something about them that makes you proud.*

2. Are you currently receiving [TANF CASH ASSISTANCE NAME IN STATE]?

- **IF YES:**
 - *How long have you been receiving [TANF CASH ASSISTANCE NAME IN STATE]?*
 - *Throughout this period, have you received TANF continuously or off and on?*
 - *[If off and on]: For about how long did you receive TANF during this most recent time you were participating in the program?*
- **IF NO:**
 - *When did you stop receiving [TANF CASH ASSISTANCE NAME IN STATE]?*
 - *Why did you stop receiving [TANF CASH ASSISTANCE NAME IN STATE]? (got a job, lost benefits for nonparticipation)*
 - *How long did you receive [TANF CASH ASSISTANCE NAME IN STATE]?*
 - *Throughout this period, did you receive [TANF CASH ASSISTANCE NAME IN STATE] continuously or off and on?*
 - *[If off and on]: For about how long did you receive [TANF CASH ASSISTANCE NAME IN STATE] during this most recent time you were participating in the program?*

3. Are you currently receiving any services or supports from [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME]?

- **IF YES:** *How long have you been participating in [PILOT ACTIVITY OF INTEREST]?*
- **IF NO:** *When did you stop receiving services or supports from [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME]?*

B. Experiences with work and school

1. Tell me about your experiences with school.

- *What is the highest grade/degree you completed? What did you like best? What was challenging?*
- *Are you in school or training now? Can you tell me about the school? What program are you in (what are you studying)? How is that going? What's helping you? What's getting in the way? What do you hope to do when you're done?*

2. Tell me about your experiences with work.

- *What types of jobs have you had throughout your life? [Interviewer: If person responds that they have never worked, skip to question 3]*
- *When was the last time you worked? It could be something that you did for hourly pay or something you did more on your own, like driving for Lyft or Uber or doing side jobs.*

- *Are you currently working in that job? If so, when did you last go into work?*
 - *If not, how long ago did you last work at that job? Why are you no longer working at that job? What happened?*
- *Tell me more about the job itself, like: [Interviewer: Text is written in present tense. Adapt to past tense if person is no longer working at that job.]*
 - *Tell me about who you work for and what your relationship is like with your employer.*
 - *How do you spend your time at your job? What kind of things do you do?*
 - *How predictable is your work schedule? How are you able to balance your family responsibilities with your job?*
 - *What do you like best about the job? What do you like least?*
- *How do you get to your job? For example do you drive your own car, take a bus, walk, Uber?*
 - *[If young children in the home] What do you do for child care while you work?*
- *Are you able to take time off if you're sick or if you have to take care of a sick family member? Are you ever concerned about losing your job if you do take this time off? Are there other things that make you concerned about losing your job?*

3. What would you like your future work life to look like?

- *Thinking about your future work [or the type of work that you are looking for now], what would you like to be doing six months from now? Where would you be working? How much money would you be making? What would you need in order to work in that job?*
- *What might get in the way of you getting that job that you just described (For example, education/credential necessary, transportation, taking care of young children, taking care of relatives with health problems, your own health problems, or it is very challenging to get a job in the area)?*
 - *What supports could help you get that job you just described? [Interviewer: Probe for support from friends, family, coworkers, employers, or a program they were participating in.]*
- *How hopeful do you feel about your future related to work?*

C. Experiences connecting with the TANF program

1. Tell me about when you first learned about [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME].

- *When was that?*
- *What brought you into the program? What, if anything, had you heard about the program?*
- *What were your initial impressions?*
- *What were your hopes? Your fears?*

2. Walk me through what happened when you first went to [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME].*

- *What happened when you first started the program?*

- *Did you talk to someone about what you wanted to work on or what you needed out of the program? What was that conversation like?*
- *How did you learn about the available activities and services? What interested you?*
- *Did you need to do anything to begin receiving cash assistance?*
- *What did the process of selecting [PROVIDER ORGANIZATION NAME OR ACTIVITY] look like? What were your options? What made you decide to choose the path you did?*

3. Tell me in your own words, what do (did) you need to do as part of the [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME]? [Note: Can also say, “to continue receiving your cash assistance”.]*

- *How did you learn about what you need to do in the program?*
- *What documentation were you required to submit about your participation or progress? How frequently were you required to submit documentation? How easy or burdensome was this process?*
- *Tell me about what happened if you didn't follow through on what you need to do (e.g., losing cash assistance).*
- *Tell me about anything that you found confusing or hard to understand about what you needed to do in the program.*
- *What would have helped you better understand what you need to do as part of the program?*

D. Experiences participating in the TANF program

1. Who do (did) you work with most in [TANF PROGRAM/PILOT NAME]? [Interviewer: Probe for the name and information about each person mentioned. Probe for case manager/coach/employment worker at TANF program, activity provider, and eligibility worker.]*

- *What kind of help did [FILL IN NAME] provide?*
- *How did you first connect with [FILL IN NAME]?*
- *How often did you meet with [FILL IN NAME]? Did you meet with [FILL IN NAME] in-person, by phone, by video?*
- *How frequently were you in contact with [FILL IN NAME] outside of your meetings by phone, email, text, etc.?*
- *What generally happened at these meetings? What kinds of things did you talk about? Tell me about what happened at your last meeting.*
- *Would you say your experiences with [FILL IN NAME] were generally positive or negative? Why?*
- *What was most helpful about [FILL IN NAME]? Is there something that they could do better?*

2. Tell me about the services or activities you participated in within [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME] most recently. [Interviewer: Probe about all services mentioned.]*

- *When did you get connected to [SERVICE/ACTIVITY]?*
- *What did [SERVICE/ACTIVITY] involve?*

- *Did you use any particular tools or resources as part of this [SERVICE/ACTIVITY], such as [TOOLS USED IN STATE PILOT]? If so, what did you think about them?*
- *What was easy or challenging about [SERVICE/ACTIVITY]?*
- *What did you like or dislike about [SERVICE/ACTIVITY]?*
- *Did [SERVICE/ACTIVITY] meet your expectations/hopes?*
- *How helpful was [SERVICE/ACTIVITY]? Tell me more about that.*
- *How flexible was [SERVICE/ACTIVITY] to meet your needs? Was there a time you needed something different than what the program usually provided? What happened?*
- *How easy or hard was it to participate, and why?*
- *At any point, did you stop participating in [SERVICE/ACTIVITY]? Why?*
- *[If participant is not currently working] How helpful do you think [SERVICE/ACTIVITY] is in preparing you to find work?*
- *What are your impressions of the program now?*

3. Tell me about the supports you receive(d) while participating in [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME] (e.g., you may have received transportation assistance such as bus passes or gas cards, child care, or help with paying for training materials such as uniforms or tools). [Interviewer: Probe for information about all supports mentioned.]*

- *Tell me a little more about your experience with [SUPPORT]. What did it cover? For how long did you receive it (or have you received it)? How did you receive it (or how are you receiving it)?*
- *When did you receive this [SUPPORT]? Was it before the expense was created or were you reimbursed afterwards?*
- *How helpful was [SUPPORT]?*
- *How important were the supports for your ability to participate [TANF PROGRAM/PILOT NAME]? Which supports were the most important?*
- *What additional supports do you wish you received?*

4. Did you ever lose [TANF BENEFITS/CASH ASSISTANCE] when you were participating in [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME]? What happened? [Note: Participants can be sanctioned for noncompliance with TANF program requirements or for not cooperating with child support requirements.]

- *When did that happen? Why did you not participate or stop participating in [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME]?*
- *How did you learn about losing your [TANF BENEFITS/CASH ASSISTANCE] for nonparticipation?*
- *What did you do after you learned about it?*
- *Were you able to begin receiving [TANF BENEFITS/CASH ASSISTANCE] again? Why or why not?*

- *What was easy or difficult about getting your [TANF BENEFITS/CASH ASSISTANCE] back? How much time did it take? What could have made the process easier?*
- *How did the loss or reduction of [TANF BENEFITS/CASH ASSISTANCE] affect you or your family?*

5. [If no longer participating in TANF activities and did exit for employment] Tell me about when you stopped receiving [TANF BENEFITS/CASH ASSISTANCE] because you were employed.

- *How did you learn about your [TANF BENEFITS/CASH ASSISTANCE] stopping?*
- *How soon after you got a job did you stop receiving [TANF BENEFITS/CASH ASSISTANCE]?*
- *What types of transition assistance or support services did you receive?*

6. [If no longer participating in TANF activities and did not exit for employment] Tell me about your experience looking for and finding employment after you participated in [SERVICE/ACTIVITY].

- *Did [SERVICE/ACTIVITY] help you in your job search or new job? In what ways?*
- *Did you gain new job skills through [SERVICE/ACTIVITY]? What skills?*
- *[IF ENROLLED IN MULTIPLE SERVICES/ACTIVITIES]: Which activity was most helpful? Why?*

E. Reflections on TANF program experience

1. How do you feel about your experiences with [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME] overall? Tell me about that.

- *How flexible or responsive has the [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME] been to your needs? Tell me more about that.*
- *What did you achieve? What did you learn?*
- *What was the most positive aspect of participating in the program? The most challenging?*
- *What could have improved your experience? What would improve the experience for others?*

2. How do you think your experience with [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME] prepared you for work or your work-related goals?

- *What services were most helpful in preparing you for work?*
- *What services could be better in preparing you for work?*

3. [If the participant has been in TANF before] How does your most recent experience in [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME] compare with your prior experience?

4. If you could make one change to improve [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME], what would it be?

5. Before we finish up, is there anything else you would like to add about your experience with [TANF PROGRAM NAME/PILOT NAME]? Any questions for me?

Thanks so much for talking with me today. It's so important to hear about your experiences and insight, and we really appreciate you walking us through your time in the program.

If you have questions, please contact us at TANFPilotEval@mathematica-mpr.com. Thank you for your time and input! *[Interviewer: share project business card with contact information]*