

***2014 ACF Region X  
Oregon TANF Technical Assistance Site Visit  
September 18-19, 2014  
  
Summary Report***

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## Overview and Background

In partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA), Region X, the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) hosted representatives from ICF International (ICF) on September 18-19, 2014. Oregon and Region X requested this Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) technical assistance (TA) site visit in response to rising TANF caseloads in the state, challenges addressing budgetary concerns, issues meeting the employment and service needs of TANF participants, and other concerns stemming from the ongoing effects of the recent recession. Oregon also intended to use this TA opportunity to learn about promising practices and other strategies that could support their ongoing TANF redesign efforts. Oregon and Region X identified three TA priority areas to address during the site visit:

- *Program Assessment:* Working to refine its front end services, the state, which is the process of designing new assessment tools, was interested in exploring aspects of alternative, evidence-based assessments.
- *Performance-Based Contracting:* The state had been looking into developing partner contracts with standardized incentives and performance-based outcomes. It was interested in discussing strategies for designing and implementing these types of contracts and learning about streamlining their work program to improve participation rate outcomes.
- *Change Management:* As a result of their TANF redesign, Oregon anticipates significant changes to TANF staff duties, priorities, client engagement strategies, and community partnership efforts. The state was interested in discussing how to use change management to get “buy-in” from TANF managers and frontline staff on changes associated with TANF redesign.

This report shares highlights from and next steps regarding the *Oregon TANF Technical Assistance Site Visit*. It encompasses the notes and impressions of three ICF representatives who participated in the visit: Linda Martin, Expert Consultant, Lesley Smith, Program Manager and Patrick Heiman, Training and Technical Assistance Manager.

## Day One – September 18, 2014

### Community Works Project Site Visit – Portland, Oregon

- **Tou Cha**, Oregon Department of Human Services, District Two, Self-Sufficiency Program Manager
- **Rene DuBoise**, Oregon Department of Human Services, District Two, District Manager
- **Michelle Richards**, Oregon Department of Human Services, District Two, Self-Sufficiency

#### *Case Manager*

- **Rob Olsen**, Oregon Department of Human Services, South East Portland Self-Sufficiency Office, District Two, Self-Sufficiency Line Manager
- **Tammy Brooks**, Oregon Department of Human Services, District Two, TANF Policy Analyst
- **Jake Baird**, Community Works Project, Workforce Specialist

ICF consultants initially met with the Community Works Project (an Oregon DHS “JOBS Opportunity and Basic Skills” (JOBS) site) and Oregon DHS District Two staff (Oregon’s largest DHS district with over thirteen branch offices serving 8,000 TANF participants). The purpose of this discussion was for DHS staff to share the current status of TANF in the state including field processes, TANF/JOBS services, and contractor partnerships. DHS staff shared background on why the state’s TANF caseloads have increased, as well foundational information about Oregon TANF participant characteristics and program intake processes.

#### *Background on TANF in Oregon*

Oregon staff shared that approximately eight years ago, Oregon’s economy began a drastic downturn that resulted in rising unemployment and TANF caseloads. With federal TANF monies fixed, the state could either restrict new applicants to conserve state money or elect not to limit participation, which would increase the caseload. According to DHS staff, Oregon, unlike most other states, chose the latter approach. Oregon, subsequently, led the nation in TANF caseload growth from 2007 to 2013.<sup>1</sup> Staff caseloads also swelled to 200 families per case manager. The exponential caseload increase prompted Oregon to separate eligibility and job service duties to allow caseworkers to concentrate on only one of these tasks. Ongoing budgetary restrictions also required that the program focus more resources on determining eligibility. The state believes that these new approaches may be the cause of their decreased work participation and job orientation attendance rates. Oregon now plans, as part of their TANF redesign process (see below for more details), to combine and co-locate eligibility and job services. Streamlining this process, they believe, will result in better work participation and job placement rates.

#### *TANF Population Characteristics and Intake Processes*

Staff next shared general characteristics of TANF participants in District Two. The majority of TANF participants in this District have some type of job plan, but the District believes only 15-20% of these

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<sup>1</sup> The number of single parent families in the TANF program nearly doubled from 2007 to 2013, and the number of two-parent families increased fivefold. In June 2013, more than 95,000 Oregonians from 35,000 families received TANF.

individuals are “job-ready.” A significant percentage of these TANF participants face some type of drug, alcohol, or mental illness challenge (30-40%) and many have criminal backgrounds.

Staff also discussed DHS’ current TANF intake approaches. In most instances, individuals calling or entering the TANF office receive a same-day intake appointment. Eligibility staff conducts a face-to-face intake and each potential participant is provided a packet of resources describing their benefits eligibility. Intake caseworkers conduct a complete review of each participant’s needs and resources and assign him or her to one of three levels:

- **Level One:** The participant is “job ready” and is immediately moved into work participation activities (e.g., job search and/or vocational training).
- **Level Two:** The participant is in need of some type of family stabilization support over the first 30 days of his/her TANF receipt (e.g., assistance with child care, housing, or other short-term assistance).
- **Level Three:** The participant faces significant and/or numerous barriers to becoming “job ready.”

One week following intake, new TANF participants undergo job orientation<sup>2</sup> where they meet with a job coordinator and their caseworker. At this stage, eligible participants may be assigned to some type of vocational rehabilitation and/or training.

### [Oregon Department of Human Services Division Headquarters – Salem, Oregon](#)

- **Jennifer Granera**, Oregon Department of Human Services, Office of Self-Sufficiency Programs/TANF, Operations and Policy Analyst

ICF staff next met with DHS staff at the agency’s headquarters in Salem, Oregon to review the state’s plans for TANF redesign and to discuss recommendations on performance-based contracting and change management.

#### TANF Redesign and Change Management

Oregon is currently redesigning its TANF plan to better align the system with early learning, health, food security, and child welfare supports. The redesign also aims to emphasize services and referrals to local partners and stakeholders. Specifically, the redesign plan prioritizes:

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<sup>2</sup> DHS staff showed ICF a video that is part of the job orientation process. The video describes the role of work specialists and caseworkers while also showing how the agency partners with local employers. The video closed with a series of TANF participant self-sufficiency success stories.

- Increasing the number of case manager positions.
- Expanding contracts with community based organizations that can help with participant retention.
- Making social services more “flexible.”
- Raising the income limits for TANF exit to reduce the “fiscal cliff” effect.<sup>3</sup>
- Training TANF staff on redesign processes and subsequent changes.
- Improving client engagement and case management outcomes.
- Implementing technical solutions to allow DHS and their partners to share client information.
- Utilizing performance based contracting for all partners and contractors.
- Streamlining eligibility.
- Conducting research on former TANF participants.

Oregon also identified four specific targets they hope to achieve as a result of TANF redesign implementation:

- Five percent increase in work placements for TANF participants (both part- and full-time).
- Five percent increase in the number of full-time positions for TANF participants.
- Three percent decrease in the rate of participant return to TANF.
- Continue to meet 50 percent TANF federal participation target rate.

Using the TANF redesign priorities above as a guide, the state is currently convening DHS staff composed workgroups (referred to by the state as “workstreams”) to discuss redesign implementation. Individual workstreams cover a wide variety of topics, such as program engagement, community partnerships, communications, and community engagement. ICF recommended including caseworkers and case managers in the workstream process as early as possible. Generating buy-in and creating advocates for change requires substantial opportunities for frontline staff to share ideas, provide feedback, and, in the end, help lead change efforts. ICF also suggested allowing case workers and managers to take the lead in creating any TANF redesign training materials and instructing their peers on new curricula.

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<sup>3</sup> DHS staff repeatedly discussed frustration with how small cash payments were to TANF participants. Oregon’s TANF cash payment amounts have risen very little in the past 15 years. In 1997, the maximum payment for a family of three was \$503 a month to keep pace with inflation it would have been \$730 by 2013, but the maximum payment has only risen by \$3 to \$506 a month.

### Performance Based Contracting and Change Management

Oregon primarily uses a cost reimbursement model with some opportunities for incentive-based bonuses in their contractor agreements. Bonuses are usually tied to a JOBS site's number of monthly job placements. The state's current contract template does not include any guidance around incentives or performance-based outcomes. As part of Oregon's TANF redesign, however, it would like to create standardization across partner contracts as they relate to performance-based incentives. Based on its work with other states on these issues, ICF provided the below series of relevant recommendations:

- *Incentivize the outcomes that are important to the success of the program.* For example, ICF suggested that Oregon offer its contractors performance bonuses around job placement if the state wants to see strong job performance numbers. ICF also suggested that Oregon ensure priority outcomes are supported by actual data.
- *Prioritize incentives.* Only chose one or two outcomes to incentivize through performance bonuses.
- *Determine the performance incentive budget in advance of implementation.* ICF suggested that Oregon make sure it has sufficient funds to cover the maximum eligible incentive payments contractors may earn. To do this, the TANF program should engage its information technology and accounting staff well in advance of finalizing any performance-based contract.
- *Communicate with current and potential contractors.* Prior to altering the existing contract structure, communicate with existing and potential contractors about the purpose and importance of performance-based incentives.
- *Consider other state contracting templates.* ICF's Linda Martin offered to share South Carolina's performance-based contracting template.
- *Participate in a future Online Work Readiness Assessment (OWRA) demonstration.* As part of a brief conversation regarding the state's need for a comprehensive participant assessment, ICF offered, on a later date, to provide Oregon DHS staff with a demonstration of the OWRA Tool.

## **Day Two – September 19, 2014**

### Central City Concern (TANF Alliance Meeting) – Portland, Oregon

- **Jennifer Granera**, Oregon Department of Human Services, Office of Self-Sufficiency Programs/TANF, Operations and Policy Analyst
- **Rebecca Birenbaum**, Chief Compliance and Administrative Officer, Central City Concern
- **Jeff Kline**, Policy Advocate, Oreong Food Bank

- **Phillip Kennedy-Wong**, Policy Advocate, Oregon Food Bank
- **Rochelle Graff**, Executive Support, Oregon Department of Human Services
- **Patty Whitney-Wise**, Executive Director, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon

ICF representatives also attended an Oregon TANF Alliance meeting. The Alliance is a coalition comprised of Oregon DHS TANF staff and community-based partners, such as food banks and housing support organizations that serve TANF families and other low-income groups. The meeting occurred at Central City Concern – a nonprofit agency serving single adults and families in the Portland metro area who are impacted by homelessness, poverty, and addiction. Ms. Granera opened the meeting by reviewing DHS’ TANF redesign efforts to date, as well as the policy and program implementation implications redesign may have for community partners. Highlights from the meeting include:

- Acknowledgement that Oregon’s TANF redesign places heavy emphasis on flexible service delivery for the TANF participant that comes in large part from partner agencies, such as food banks and local community action partners.
- Discussion that staff from these partner agencies will participate in the TANF program’s workstream design process beginning in early October 2014.
- Discussion that TANF should be presented as a partner with other organizations serving low-income individuals – not discussed as a standalone program.
- Discussion around ensuring TANF leavers transition to sustainable employment. Alliance members discussed steps needed to connect individuals to vocational rehabilitation services, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) supports, and Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) supports and programs.
- The desire and need to offer case managers education credits/certifications for participating in TANF redesign training.
- Conversation about understanding the “culture shift” that will occur among TANF caseworkers as they move from a “crisis” mode, carrying very high caseloads, to more manageable caseloads that will allow for more oversight and case management supports.

### District Two Headquarters (Closing Meeting) – Portland, Oregon

- **Jennifer Granera**, Oregon Department of Human Services, Office of Self-Sufficiency Programs/TANF, Operations and Policy Analyst

- **Rochelle Graff**, *Executive Support, Oregon Department of Human Services*
- **Tou Cha**, *Oregon Department of Human Services, District Two, Self-Sufficiency Program Manager*
- **Rene DuBoise**, *Oregon Department of Human Services, District Two, District Manager*

ICF staff met with Oregon DHS staff to discuss next steps following the technical assistance site visit. The group discussed documentation and further technical assistance that would benefit Oregon's TANF redesign work and beyond. Specific next steps include:

- Linda Martin will share with Oregon DHS staff South Carolina's organizational hierarchy, imaging system guidelines, and performance-based contracting templates.
- Patrick Heiman will work with Rebecca Eaton, ICF, to arrange an OWRA demonstration in support of Oregon's efforts to revise their program assessment resources.
- Patrick Heiman will share with Oregon DHS staff the official announcement of the next wave of Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) funding, when released. The state expressed interest in applying to support in-home nursing care in the Coos Bay, Oregon area.

With approval from OFA's Region X and Central offices, ICF will convene a follow-up meeting with Oregon DHS staff to discuss additional ways in which it can support Oregon's redesign and other efforts.