

Peer TA: Director's Den

April 2014: Reframing the Discussion about Welfare, Opportunity, and the War on Poverty



The Director's Den is a special section of the Peer TA website that was created to facilitate communication between the Director of the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and TANF program stakeholders. Periodically, the OFA Director will provide timely insights and useful information. This article seeks to address current issues related to the program, poverty, and American families. I welcome (and encourage) your feedback and communication through peerta@icfi.com.

Hello, and welcome to the Director's Den. My name is Earl Johnson, and I am the Director of the Office of Family Assistance (OFA). This year, we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty and my team and I have been thinking about ways to better engage you and our partners on the economic challenges facing low-income parents, children and families who we serve. Today, we know how housing instability, drug use, domestic violence, low-wage work, lack of healthcare and a whole host of other challenges are interrelated and comprise the environment in which many families reside. These issues are complex, and as we learn more about their root causes and impacts on families, communities and the nation as a whole, it becomes important to have a dialogue.

In line with the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) [2014 Strategic Plan](#), OFA is focusing its efforts to take on a variety of key topics, including boys and young men of color issues, homelessness, employment and workforce development strategies, domestic violence and drug use. We hope that you will take this opportunity to engage with us in these ongoing discussions. How do

we reframe conversations about sustainable career paths, stable relationships and families, responsible and engaged fathers, and healthy children? How do we shift common perceptions about not only the TANF program, but also the women and families eligible for and receiving assistance? OFA has been thinking through these topics at the federal level - for example, through our involvement with the President's [My Brother's Keeper](#) initiative, and the [U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness' Interagency Work Group on Ending Family Homelessness](#) - but we've been missing the voice of those of you at the state and local levels, dealing with these issues head on. We started the Director's Den to provide TANF stakeholders a platform to hear from and directly communicate with OFA and me on a range of critical issues. We look forward to hearing from and working with you, to better understand the challenges faced by our families, and to gather information on how to make TANF as responsive and effective a resource as possible. We in OFA look forward to having these periodic updates and communications with members of the TANF field and encourage your feedback and communication. The Peer TA Web site provides a variety of ways for you to communicate with your peers and OFA:

- If you have questions or comments, feel free to send them through to peerta@icfi.com.
- [Submit a Question to Your Peers](#). The Peer TA Network provides the Question and Answer forum to facilitate the process of information sharing within and among States on important topics to welfare assistance programs and low-income families.

- [Request Technical Assistance](#). The Peer TA Network provides free Technical Assistance services to States, counties, localities, and Tribal organizations, operating the TANF program, which can include facilitated roundtables, site exchanges, workshops, and moderated teleconferences. The Peer TA approach emphasizes peer-to-peer learning and allows users to exchange information and network.

In the coming months we'll be discussing re-engaging disconnected mothers to the workforce, improving employment success for fathers, addressing Asian and Pacific Islander poverty and a whole host of issues of relevance to OFA and we believe to you as well.

Until next time,
Earl