

# **Improving Program Performance by Strengthening TANF Responsiveness**

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**Presentation at the ACF Regional TANF Directors Meeting  
Denver, CO**

**September 18, 2014**

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Michelle K. Derr, Mathematica Policy Research  
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# Workshop Goals

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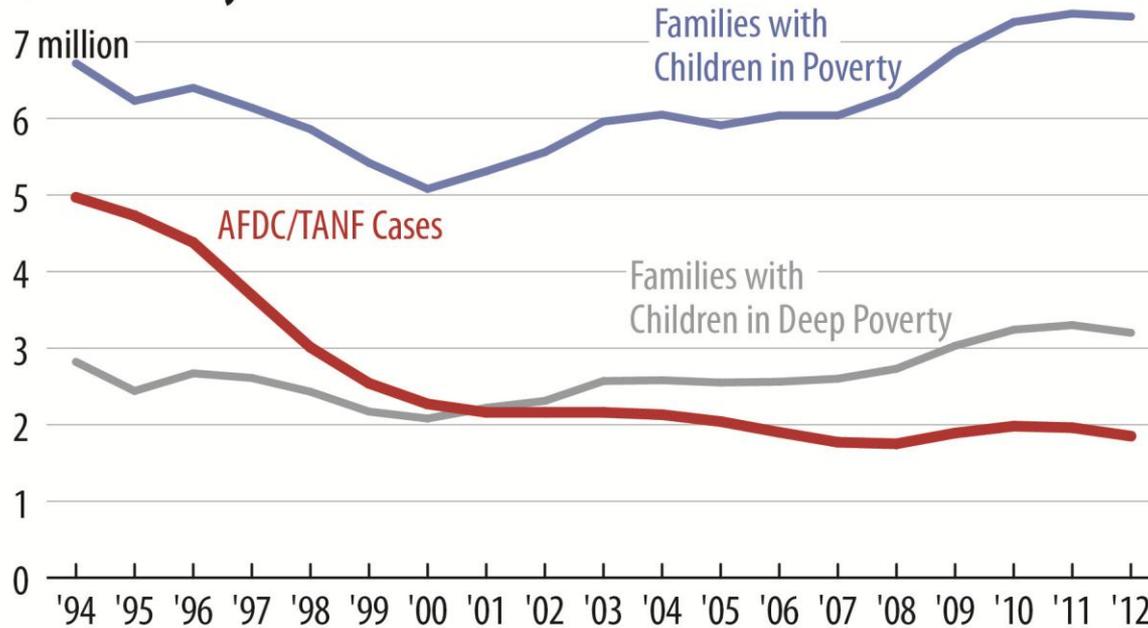
- **By the end of the session, participants will have:**
  - **Discussed how TANF program performance fits into the overall safety net for low-income families.**
  - **Examined the responsiveness of TANF work programs are for participants and nonparticipants (including those who are eligible for TANF, but not receiving it).**
  - **Explored the unique intersection of what a strong, responsive TANF program might look like and how states might implement some of program components.**
  - **Considered strategies for monitoring performance and testing the “success” of policy/program changes.**

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# Trends in the TANF Safety Net

# Fewer TANF Families, Despite Increasing Need

## TANF Cases Have Declined Dramatically, Including in Years When Poverty Has Increased

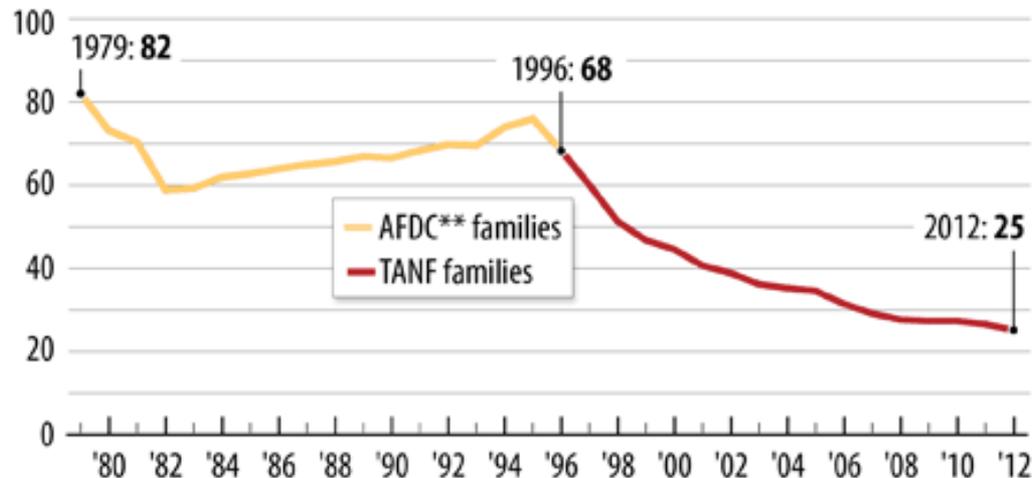


Source: CBPP analysis of poverty data from the Current Population Survey and AFDC/TANF caseload data from Health and Human Services and (since 2006) caseload data collected by CBPP from state agencies.

# TANF Serves Small Share of Poor Families

## TANF's\* Role as a Safety Net Has Declined Sharply Over Time

Number of families receiving AFDC/TANF benefits for every 100 families with children in poverty



\*Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

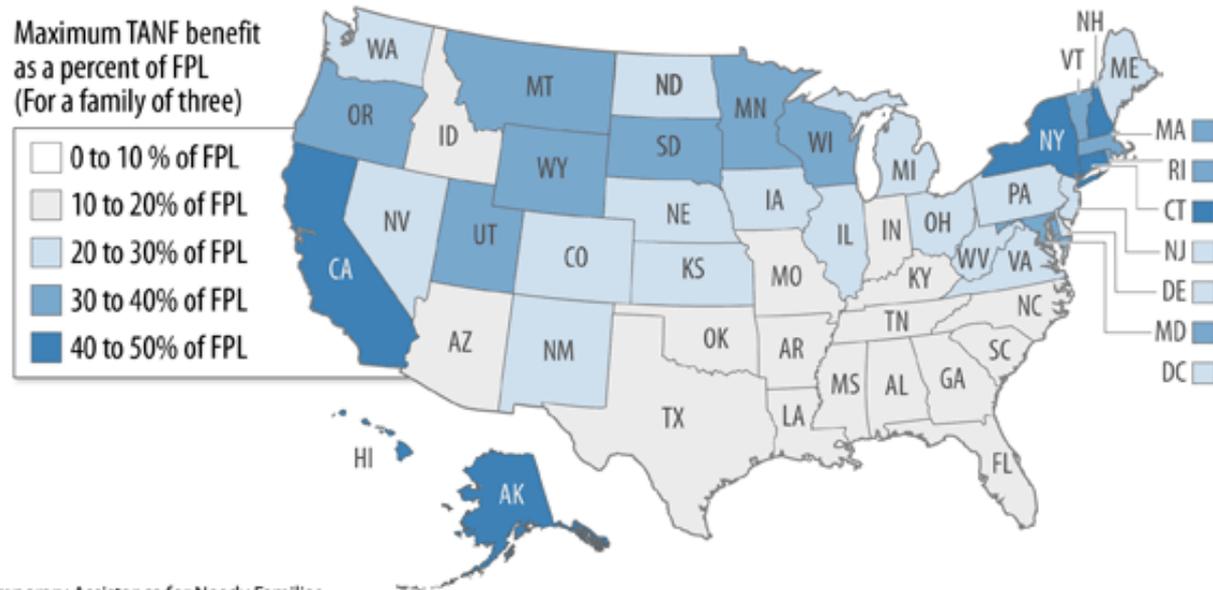
\*\*Aid to Families with Dependent Children

Source: CBPP analysis of poverty data from the Current Population Survey and AFDC/TANF caseload data from Health and Human Services and (since 2006) caseload data collected by CBPP from state agencies.

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# TANF Families Remain Extremely Poor

## Maximum TANF\* Benefits Leave Families Well Below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)



\*Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

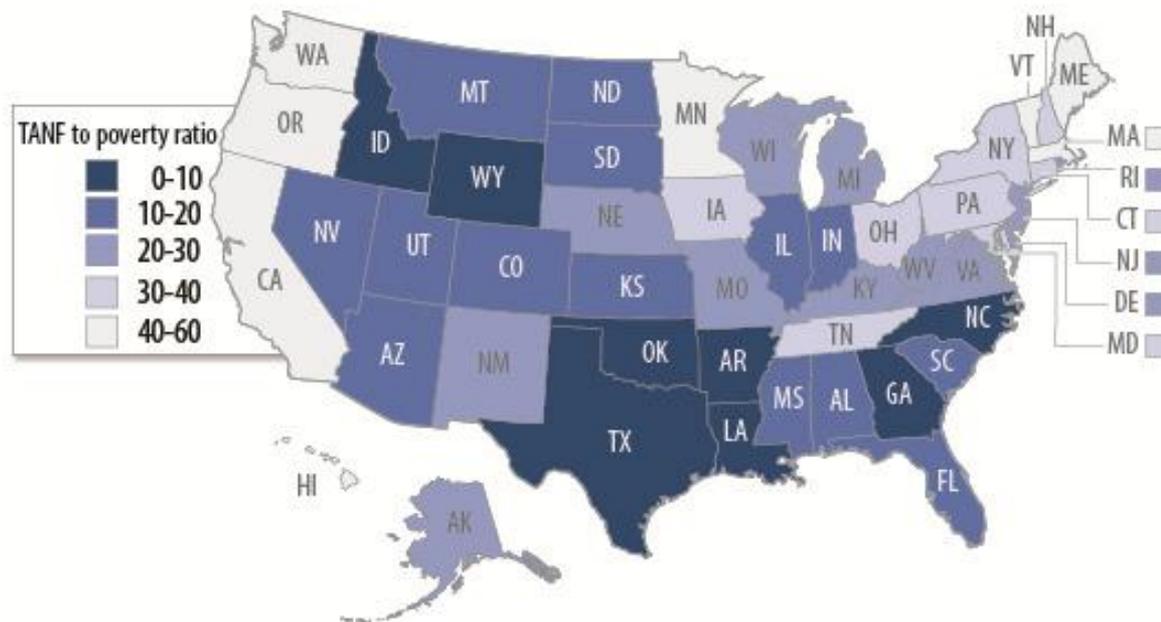
Note: Hawaii and Alaska FPLs are higher than the other 48 states.

Source: Calculated from 2014 HHS Poverty Guidelines and CBPP-compiled data on July 2014 benefit levels.

# TANF Safety Net Varies Across States

## TANF Provides a Safety Net to a Small Share of Poor Families

Number of families receiving TANF benefits  
for every 100 families in poverty with children, by state (2012)



Source: CBPP analysis of poverty data from Current Population Survey and TANF caseload data from Health and Human Services (since 2006) caseload data collected by CBPP from state agencies.

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# TANF Lifts Few Families Above *half* of the FPL

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## TANF\* Lifts Many Fewer Children out of Deep Poverty\*\* Than AFDC Did

### TANF (2010)

Lifted 24% of children who otherwise would have been in deep poverty



### AFDC\*\*\* (1995)

Lifted 62% of children who otherwise would have been in deep poverty



\*Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

\*\*Deep poverty = income less than 50 percent of the federal poverty line

\*\*\*Aid to Families with Dependent Children

Source: CBPP analysis of Current Population Survey, additional data from HHS TRIM model.

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# Elements of a Work-Focused Safety Net Program

# Work-Focused Safety Net Program

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- Relates to the needs, conditions of the labor market
    - Preparing people for available jobs and providing skills and training employers need
  - Recognizes need for and supports multiple pathways to work (NOT one-size-fits-all)
    - Varying education, experience, capacity and interest levels require customized employment pathways
  - Provides assistance that improves employment and earning outcomes, leads to self-sufficiency
    - Also services that support work
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# Work-Focused Safety Net Program (cont.)

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- Recognize the diversity of the caseload
    - Steady work with significant hours may not be realistic goal for all
    - Set expectations consistent with ability to succeed
    - Do not exclude the most vulnerable families through work requirements they cannot meet
  - Provides adequate cash assistance when people are unable to work
    - Individual or labor market inability
  - Considers impact of policies on children
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## **Thought questions:**

- (1) How would you describe your program now? What works? What doesn't?**
- (2) What changes might improve your program?**

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# TANF Program Environment

# Changing Demands

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- **Decrease in federal funding to support TANF programs**
  - Declining value and reallocation of the TANF block grant
  - Discontinuation of federal supplemental grants
  - End of American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) funds
- **Increase in the demand for public assistance programs**
- **High unemployment, fewer full-time jobs**

# Responses by States and Localities

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- **Explicit efforts to reduce program costs**
  - Reductions in state and local administrative and program staffing
  - Reduction in the amount of the cash grant
  - Decreased availability of work and personal supports
- **Limit TANF caseload growth**
- **Modified contracts with local employment service providers**
- **Rethinking TANF practices and performance measures**

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# Customizing Employment Services

# Customizing Employment Services

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- **Getting and keeping a job is a process**
- **Different clients require different approaches to service delivery, “start where the client is at”**
- **“Success” may measured in a variety of ways**
  - **Educational attainment/credentialing**
  - **Job placement**
  - **Wages**
  - **Retention**
  - **Progress toward work**

# Customizing Employment Services (cont.)

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- **Implementing a customized, employment-focused approach may influence:**
  - **Assessment**
  - **Work and program requirements**
  - **Case management and planning**
  - **Work-focused activities**
  - **Personal and work supports**
  - **Monitoring and tracking**
  - **Performance measures and program outcomes**
- **Collaborative partnerships can expand existing services**

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# Review of Workshop Goals

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- **By the end of the session, participants will have:**
  - **Discussed how TANF program performance fits into the overall safety net for low-income families. (Session 1)**
  - **Examined the responsiveness of TANF work programs are for participants and nonparticipants (including those who are eligible for TANF, but not receiving it). (Session 1)**
  - **Explored the unique intersection of what a strong, responsive TANF program might look like and how states might implement some of program components. (Session 2)**
  - **Considered strategies for monitoring performance and testing the “success” of policy/program changes. (Session 2)**

# Stages of Change

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- **Pre-contemplation – No recognition of need for or interest in change**
- **Contemplation – Thinking about changing**
- **Preparation – Planning for change**
- **Action – Adopting new habits**
- **Maintenance – Ongoing practice of new, stronger services**

# Identifying Promising Practices

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- **What promising practices does your state implement for TANF clients who are: (1) work-ready, and (2) work progressing**
- **Highlight promising practices in the areas of:**
  - **Assessment**
  - **Case management and planning**
  - **Work activities**
  - **Personal and work supports**
  - **Performance measures and program outcomes**

# Promising Practices

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- **Integrate a strong program message about the benefits of family self-sufficiency and stability**
- **Make strategic investments in services and supports**
- **Customize case management and service delivery**
- **Emphasize and incentivize goal-directed behaviors in progressing toward work**
- **Build strong TANF/employment networks (e.g., government agencies, community partners, employers, specialized service providers)**
- **Broadly define employment-focused outcomes**

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**What one or two program changes would you like to implement to create a more responsive TANF program?**

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# Monitoring Program Performance

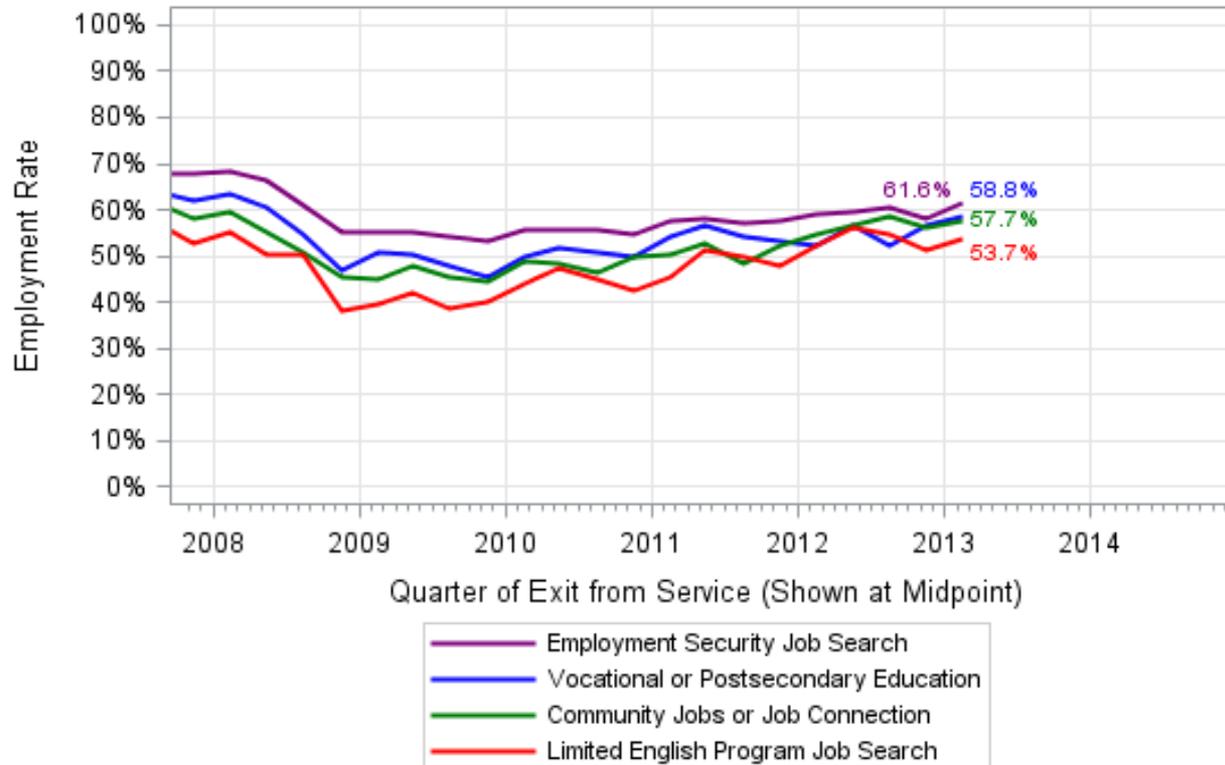
# WA WorkFirst Performance Chartbook

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- WA state publishes monthly data-driven chartbook
    - Over 100 pages, over 50 measures
    - Appears to all be administrative data or matches
  - Employment outcome measures include:
    - Rates of employment after various types of services (e.g., job search, vocational education)
    - Quarterly and hourly wage data after completing various types of services
    - Sufficient employment to qualify for UI after services
    - <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/performance/measures.asp>
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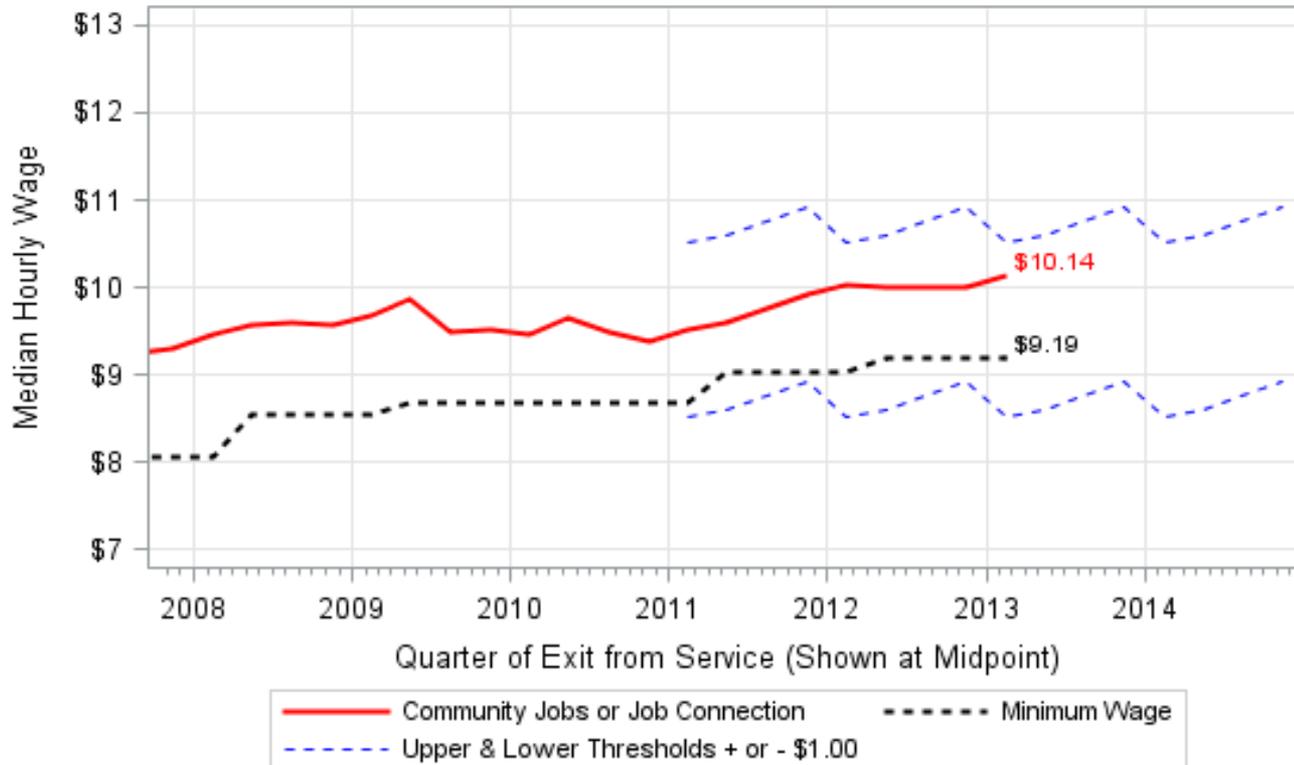
# Example: Tracking employment rates after exiting various services

Employment Rates in Quarter One, Two, or Three After Selected Services for WorkFirst Adults



# Example: Tracking hourly wage after subsidized employment exit

Median Hourly Wage in Quarter Three After Exiting Commerce Community Jobs or Job Connection



# Connecticut DOL At-A-Squint

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- Monthly Jobs First Employment Services data (TANF cash assistance families) includes:
    - Employment barriers by type and number
    - Types of activities participating in (# and %)
    - Employment rates
    - Hourly wage levels – by \$ and against benchmarks (e.g. FPL)
  - <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/weltowrk/Squint/2014/Squint%20Jul%202014.pdf>
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# Evaluating Program/Policy Changes

# Recommendations

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- **Start by identifying the intended outcomes and activities implemented to achieve them**
- **Decide the type of evaluation that is feasible**
  - **Implementation evaluation: How did the program operate?**
  - **Impact evaluation: Did the program make a difference?**
- **Ideally, use both implementation and impact evaluation to test and understand program success**
- **Emergence of “Opportunistic Experiments” or rapid-cycle evaluation**

# Success!

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# For More Information

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