



***2014 Region IX State & Territory  
TANF Technical Assistance Meeting  
September 16-17, 2014***

***Summary Report***



This technical assistance activity was funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, Region IX and managed by ICF International for Contract No. **HHSP2332009563WC**, Task Order **HHSP2337018T** "TANF Training and Technical Assistance."

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## Overview

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA), Region IX hosted TANF Administrators from Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii, and Nevada at the 2014 Region IX TANF Technical Assistance Workshop in San Francisco, California on September 16-17, 2014. In addition to providing training and informational workshops covering current research approaches and practice models such as strategies to address executive functioning/brain science research; improving client engagement; data system integration models; partnerships to resolve family homelessness; and new research opportunities in the TANF field, the meeting included sessions designed to facilitate dialogue and sharing between the attendees. In this context, State and Territory TANF Administrators shared strategies they are employing to improve program performance and outcomes for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) participants, and discussed current operational, practice, legislative, and technical challenges within their respective jurisdictions and programs.

This report summarizes highlights from this 2014 ACF Region IX TANF Technical Assistance Workshop.

## Day One – September 16, 2014

### Welcome and Introductions

- **Julie Fong**, TANF Regional Program Manager, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, Region IX
- **Robert E. “Bob” Garcia**, Regional Administrator, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Region IX
- **Mary Roberto**, Senior Program Manager, ICF International

In this session, speakers described key themes and topics for the meeting and reviewed the agenda topics, which included:

- Promising TANF participant-focused services.
- Understanding the effects of toxic stress on executive functioning to improve service provision.
- New collaborations across federal divisions within ACF.
- New service innovations.
- Homeless programs and TANF partnerships.
- Improving data sharing and discussing issues of confidentiality.

The speakers noted that additional time was allocated this year to allow for more extensive peer exchanges and dialogue between participants, as requested in previous years. Speakers challenged participants to share obstacles they have faced, how they have overcome them, and to showcase their innovations and what they are particularly proud of accomplishing this year.

### Policy and Program Updates with OFA Leadership

- **Susan Golonka**, Acting Director, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance
- **Julie Fong**, Regional Program Manager, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, Region IX

Susan Golonka, Acting Director, Office of Family Assistance (OFA), led this session, providing updates on current key priorities for ACF/OFA, federal legislation, regulatory and financial updates, and long-term technical assistance opportunities.

#### OFA priorities

Ms. Golonka shared several priority areas for ACF/OFA in the coming fiscal year, including: family homelessness; adverse childhood experiences and their relationship to executive functioning and toxic stress; two generation approach to addressing poverty; subsidized employment; career pathways and credentialing; the White House's *Job Driven Training Checklist*<sup>1</sup>; and a focus on unaccompanied minors and trauma-informed care.

#### Federal legislative/regulatory and financial update

Concerning federal legislation updates, Ms. Golonka reported that there is no indication, currently, that Congress will be reauthorizing TANF; however, at the time of the meeting the House of Representatives was scheduled to vote on a continuing resolution through mid-December 2014.

Ms. Golonka also provided an update on the legislative reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) that was signed into law in July 2014. The provisions include supporting partnerships with TANF and other federal agencies. She outlined some key provisions of the Act and mentioned listening sessions that are being held to hear from stakeholders, like the TANF program, that can inform the development of regulations supporting the new law.

As far as regulatory updates, the final rule for the ban on the use of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards is pending. Useful comments were provided during the open comment period for the rule that will be incorporated into the final rule.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Job Driven Training checklist, visit:  
[http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/ready\\_to\\_work\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/ready_to_work_factsheet.pdf)

A new financial report, called the ACF-196R, has been implemented at the request of Congress and the Government Accountability Office (GAO). This new report allows for better tracking of funds spent in descriptive categories that were not been identified on past reports. This new financial report will be a useful tool for state legislatures as well. A technical webinar was held on completing the report in September 2014 and another technical webinar was sponsored by OFA later in 2014.

### Technical assistance opportunities

In wrapping up the session, Ms. Golonka highlighted ways in which OFA offers technical assistance (TA), whether through OFA PeerTA opportunities (formerly Welfare Peer TA), regional meetings, webinars, or long-term initiatives. She also mentioned a forthcoming policy academy, which will focus on encouraging TANF programs to rethink their assessment, case management, and employment/training processes. Announcements regarding the Academy will be released in February 2015.

### Current Developments and Challenges in Region IX Jurisdictions

Each State and Territory in attendance spoke about current issues or challenges it is facing, as well as successes. General points of discussion during this session also focused on:

- Piloting and implementing a modified version of the Online Work Readiness Assessment (OWRA) tool.
- Challenges around child care for TANF recipients.
- Applying two-generational approaches to TANF.
- Understanding new business process flow implementation and outcomes.

#### **Hawaii**

Representatives from the State of Hawaii (Catherine Scardino and Cheryl Chang) provided the following updates for the State of Hawaii TANF program this session:

- Hawaii is making a culture shift from an “employment first” model to case management approach focused on supporting the employability of long-term TANF recipients, including increased emphasis on education and training through a partnership with the University of Hawaii community college system.
- Hawaii is changing its management of workflow, whereby there are two tracks for clients: 1) education, and 2) employment with case management.
- Hawaii stated that the economy has improved and the minimum wage has increased as well, but there has been an increase in public assistance cases which seems to be an anomaly.

- Hawaii reported that there are local initiatives to move chronically homeless families and individuals off the streets, and to better understand their needs.

### **Guam**

Representatives from the Territory of Guam (Tess Arcangel, Annie Soto, and Christine San Nicolas) provided the following recent updates for the TANF program:

- Guam is currently working on action steps to increase their work participation rate (WPR) by implementing a new “pay for performance” activity requirement for TANF. This activity requires clients to participate in certain activities prior to receiving benefits with the hope of increasing the participation rate. Another action step Guam has deployed in regard to increasing their WPR is a better data management system. With the new data system in place they are able to accurately capture and code client participation with the intention of increasing the WPR.
- Guam reported collaboration efforts with community stakeholders such as American Jobs Centers to provide career exploration, job search, resume advice, and job interviewing skills for TANF clients who are job ready. Also, the TANF program is working in close partnership with Guam Community College to continue with the success of the career pathway program, Helping Achieve TANF Success through Actions (HATSA). They are also working to adapt their career pathways programs to make them more attractive to men.
- Guam also reported challenges in aligning policies for all programs that are integrated into the eligibility unit of their social service operations. Not only do case workers have challenges with retaining the laws and regulations of each program, the clients also have difficulty understanding that each program (e.g., TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, etc.) has its own set of rules and requirements.

### **California**

Representatives from the State of California (Kären Dickerson and Todd Bland) provided the following updates for the State of California TANF program during this session:

- California reported that they are continuing with their interventions from last year focusing on how to increase the work participation rate through the implementation of early engagement that includes expanded subsidized employment, family stabilization, and flexibility within the CalWORKS 48-month time limit through the establishment of a prospective 24-month time clock period that provides a wide array of services and supports with fewer restrictions and requirements for TANF clients and the implementation of the Work Incentive Nutritional Supplement (WINS) program.
- In regard to the new 24-month time clock (within the 48-month time limit), clients will have more choices of activities that they can participate in during the 24-month time clock period without having to meet the core hourly requirements during the 24-month period. However,

clients must meet federal requirements after the 24-month time clock in order to continue receiving TANF.

- Also, California reported that they are conducting a multi-year research study to follow CalWORKs recipients who are using the new Welfare-to-Work 24-month time clock to assess the validity of this new approach of early engagement.
- Part of California's early engagement interventions is an Online CalWORKs Appraisal tool (OCAT) that is being piloted statewide in 2014. California contracted with ICF International to customize, deploy, and implement the tool.
- According to the State representative, the CalWORKs Housing Support Program is getting off the ground to address homelessness and housing instability for the families that they serve.
- Lastly, California reported that effective April 1, 2015 the ban on drug felons will be repealed for CalWORKs basic needs assistance benefits.

## **Nevada**

Representative from the State of Nevada (Marybeth Burroughs) provided an update on the State of Nevada TANF program as follows:

- Nevada reported that they have seen a growth in all of their programs (TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, etc.) due to moving to an online application process.
- Nevada has completed a Business Process Reengineering (BPR) effort; as a result they have opened a few new offices in the Las Vegas area, reorganized other offices, and added 70 new employees.
- Lastly, Nevada reported out on a program called Working in Nevada (WIN), a two-week motivational workshop that promotes job readiness and job search skills. The class highlights self-awareness, motivation, job seeker skills, resumes, and interviewing techniques. This program also partners with two other programs: "Dress for Success" for female interviewing clothing, and University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) for a nutrition program.

## **Arizona**

Representative from the State of Arizona (Molly Woodhouse) provided an update on the State of Arizona TANF program as follows:

- New legislation extracted the child welfare program from the Department of Economic Security and placed the child welfare program in a separate agency that reports directly to the Governor – effective July 1, 2014. This was due to the highly profiled child deaths in the State of Arizona from 2009-2012.

- Arizona reported, effective July 1, 2015, the State is undergoing a new financial system integration and setting up a new reporting management system.
- Department of Economic Security created kiosks in their offices throughout the State of Arizona to better serve clients when they are applying for benefits. This initiative was developed to reduce long lines when clients are applying for benefits in the DES offices.
- A challenge that Arizona reported on relates to the 3<sup>rd</sup> party MOE. Arizona reported that they would be in a tough spot if/when TANF reauthorization makes any changes to the way States use 3<sup>rd</sup> party MOE, because Arizona relies heavily on 3<sup>rd</sup> party MOE for its TANF program and meeting WPR.

### TANF and Family Homelessness: Strategies and Models for Improving Resources and Supports for Homeless Families

- *Kirkpatrick Tyler, Program Manager, Family Services, Weingart Center for the Homeless*
- *Lori Hunley, WorkFirst Supervisor Spokane, Washington State Department of Health and Social Services*

During this session speakers discussed leveraging TANF funds and partnerships with other public and private agencies to improve housing outcomes for TANF participants. Speakers discussed specific challenges TANF participants face and their programs' approaches to better serving homeless families. The Weingart Center for the Homeless, a Los Angeles, California based organization, has concentrated its efforts on diversion and rapid rehousing—helping keep families off the street and preventing them from becoming homeless in the first place. The program uses a comprehensive assessment that helps it to connect families with a large network of service providers and local supports. They encourage property owners to rent to homeless families by highlighting the benefits of ongoing case management and informing them of possible tax incentives. The Weingart Center also works closely with Department of Public Social Services, which has a co-located staff person in their office. The program is guided by the following principles:

- **Coordinated system of care:** A region-based program for homeless families that provides rapid rehousing and ongoing case management for community reintegration and stabilization.
- **Coordinated access:** Streamlined assessment and triage to housing and resources for homeless families.
- **Regional collaboration:** Partnerships across public and private entities that ensure homeless families are fully supported and connected to permanent housing and services.
- **Building economic and housing stability:** Facilitating connections to income, employment, and education to provide the financial resources to achieve long-term housing stability.

- **Targeted interventions:** Individualized housing and services assistance based on each family's ability to obtain and maintain permanent housing stability.

The aspects that make the program unique are that it combines federal, state, and local funding streams into one program; the program's primary goal is to find permanent housing for homeless families; it offers direct access to housing services; and its regional structure ensures that families do not need to leave their communities.

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) piloted its homeless services program and will be implementing it statewide in late 2014. The goal of the effort is to "reduce homelessness for households with children who are unsheltered or living in shelters by 50 percent by 2015." The rapid re-housing component of the program targets TANF households with immediate shelter needs and offers progressive engagement--matching housing costs to family income. The Department conducts a comprehensive evaluation that scores individuals' employability and case management needs. The Salvation Army is co-located at DSHS and works to secure permanent affordable housing for families. All partners in the Ending Family Homelessness project share a joint case plan to ensure that services are aligned. The Salvation Army also provides housing stabilization and financial services and will conduct a secondary screening with applicants to see if they meet the homelessness program criteria.

Overall, the speakers suggested that finding stable housing for homeless families requires system-level changes and coordination of policies and funding.

### Executive Functioning—What's TANF Got to Do With It?

- **Judy Parks**, *Vice President of Mobility Mentoring Programs and Services, Crittenton Women's Union*

The Crittenton Women's Union (CWU) is an economic mobility action tank that provides direct services, as well as research, public education, and advocacy. It produces several detailed reports relating to family circumstances and cost of living in Massachusetts and periodically releases a 'hot jobs' report, projecting in-demand, self-sustaining jobs in Massachusetts.

The focus of this session was on how CWU is using emerging research on brain science and executive functioning to inform how they work with low-income families. Ms. Parks discussed the effects trauma and stress can have on adult executive functioning, noting that constant exposure to high levels of stress can change how our brain functions. Specifically, she said that our brains react to stress which can change the circuitry in our brain and that continuous, unmitigated stressors can have significant effects on how we function, both as a child and into adulthood. Adults who have been consistently exposed to high-stress environments may encounter challenges with skills associated with executive functioning, such as:



- Maintaining focus and attention.
- Memory retention, including general retention of information and following multi-step instructions.
- Organizational skills, including keeping track of belongings or tasks.
- Following plans or goals through to completion.
- Thinking of logical alternatives to a particular course of action.
- Juggling competing priorities and multi-tasking.
- Time management; organizing tasks to meet deadlines.
- Weighing future implications of current decisions.
- Taking tools or information learned in one setting and applying them in another.
- Spatial awareness and spatial memory; navigating to new locations using maps or written directions; reading tables or diagrams.
- Managing life changes and changes in rules or expectations.

Ms. Parks also shared common stress-related challenges relating to an individual's health and behavior, such as controlling impulsive behaviors and regulating risk-taking, as well as higher rates of anxiety, depression, addiction disorders, and other mental illnesses.

She then noted that many of the TANF participants and families with whom CWU works have faced long periods of high stress. For example, 75 percent of the families that CWU works with are homeless or have a recent history of homelessness, 40 percent have been diagnosed with a major mental health disorder, and 43 percent report a history of abuse, violence, or trauma.

The goal at CWU, she stated, is to understand how to build the employment skills and capacities of someone who has experienced trauma or toxic stress to counteract the negative impacts on their executive functioning skills. Ms. Parks then shared ways her program helps mitigate these challenges, including:

- Implementing easy-to-use brain-science informed program design improvements, such as:
  - Decreasing noise and distractions, and adding friendly photos on walls.
  - Having a non-authoritarian affect.
  - Limiting tables, charts, and jargon in program materials.
  - Offering re-admission and bundled services.
  - Training staff about stress-related impacts and solutions.
- Providing participants with brain-science informed tools to help with program success, such as:
  - Personal organization strategies and tools.
  - Reminders/prompts.
  - Goals contracts.



- Incentives.
- Impulse/distraction control strategies.
- Automatic goal-attainment strategies.
- Problem-solving, goal-setting frameworks.
- Coaching participants for permanent improvements, focusing on:
  - Problem-solving.
  - Surfacing and weighing options.
  - Resisting swamping, impulse control, and weighing current actions against future ramifications.
  - Improving social skills and anticipating others' point of view.

She also shared specific recommendations for TANF agencies to better incorporate brain science and an understanding of stress and executive functioning into their work. She recommended the strengths-based, holistic reference tool that CWU uses, called the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency<sup>2</sup>; this tool helps individuals progress to self-sufficiency across five critical pillars (family stability, well-being, education and training, financial management, and employment and career management). Furthermore, she recommended the following strategies for agencies to enhance client success:

- Create comprehensive career pathway programs.
- Develop integrated and well-coordinated packages of support services for TANF participants.
- Set short- and long-term economic mobility goals with participants.
- Train all vendors and local office staff in motivational interviewing and executive function coaching practices and encourage the use of incentives to promote executive function skill building and goal attainment.
- Minimize the complexity of TANF program requirements so they are easier to understand, require fewer steps for completion, and require less frequent verification.
- Improve coordination between the TANF program and other supporting systems.
- Create opportunities for TANF participants to develop social networks both among participants and between participants and professionals and volunteers who can offer them career and education advice, guidance, and support.

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<sup>2</sup> To view the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency, visit: [http://www.liveworkthrive.org/research\\_and\\_tools/bridge\\_to\\_self\\_sufficiency](http://www.liveworkthrive.org/research_and_tools/bridge_to_self_sufficiency)



## Day Two – September 17, 2014

### Overview of Day One

Participants reflected on the information discussed on the first day, paying close attention to how different policies impact programs' capacity to engage individuals and families. Participants discussed how to implement programs for homeless families and understand the unique barriers they face. Facilitators also shared an overview of sessions for the second day.

### Engaging TANF Clients

- **Jodie Sue Kelly**, *Co-Founder, Cygnet Associates*

This session focused on effective strategies and approaches to engage TANF clients. Ms. Kelly gave an overview of her work in Pennsylvania, highlighting challenges relating to job placement and motivating staff to focus on participation and placement, not just compliance. She first discussed the dual challenges that TANF caseworkers must address simultaneously, namely job placement leading to long-term self-sufficiency and compliance with TANF participation requirements. Compliance, she said, has outweighed and overshadowed placement, self-sufficiency, and client motivation to succeed. And she argued that programs must switch this focus to motivate individuals to succeed and achieve self-sufficiency and in so doing, they will comply with TANF requirements. TANF caseworkers, she argued, should help clients see their participation as not just fulfilling requirements, but as an opportunity to increase their incomes and improve their lives.

She then talked about types of individual resistance—such as arguing, ignoring, and interrupting—and strategies for addressing them. There are multiple opportunities, however, to overcome these types of resistance and to switch the focus away from compliance and towards motivation, such as at the orientation, follow-up, and assessment, and during case management.

Ms. Kelly encouraged TANF programs to “pick a selling proposition” that motivates clients and shows them how their financial situation can improve through participation. She suggested programs think about the ‘theme’ of what they are selling, and to distinguish between short-term and long-term messages about TANF program goals. Short-term messages may focus on, for example, getting training and a job, while longer-term messages may focus on:

- Family self-sufficiency.
- Building a career pathway.
- Career advancement.
- Income improvements.



She then suggested programs review their current practices, assessment forms, and tools to determine whether they support and build on the themes the program wants to ‘sell’ to potential clients and whether they have a positive, hopeful message designed to engage clients. For example, with respect to assessments, she suggested that they:

- Be structured to speak about what the program can help with.
- Change the language to focus on coping strategies rather than ‘barriers’ that prevent people from moving forward.
- Allow the participant to share what their priorities are.

Likewise, she suggested orientations focus on overcoming the different forms of resistance, building participant motivation, and translating complex information and requirements into easy to digest and understand concepts. Orientations should:

- Be participatory.
- Be outcomes driven.
- Use simple concepts.
- Explain steps to achieving higher incomes.
- Create opportunities to get to know participants, encourage them to speak.
- Overview changes from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to TANF.
- Discuss the time restrictions and that TANF is not a long-term solution, but rather something to “buy you some time.”

Services, she said, should be interesting to clients, match their life goals, and help them make changes in their lives. They also must focus on client participation and outcomes and be free of bureaucratic jargon and inefficient or duplicative processes. Following these themes, changes can also be made to RFPs for contracted services, monitoring requirements, and job readiness tools. Specifically, she suggested that career planning should focus on moving participants into “competitive” jobs they can retain. Plans should set minimum standards of what participants should do and assign activities with due dates, such as cleaning up one’s Facebook page or developing a competitive resume. Ms. Kelly concluded by recommending that this culture shift, moving from compliance to motivation, includes the following key factors:

- Support from leadership.
- Proper emphasis in RFPs.
- Easy-to-understand participant plans/contracts.
- Clear monitoring requirements.
- Helpful tools, equipment, and training that are designed to make this culture shift clear to both staff and participants.

## [The Data Intersection between Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF: Potential Opportunities/Approaches to Aligning Data and Data Management Systems for Eligibility Reporting and Determination](#)

- *Kevin Burt, Associate Director, Utah Department of Workforce Services, Eligibility Services Division*

Mr. Burt talked about the impact the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and other federal laws are having on data management and computer systems used in SNAP, TANF, child support, and child welfare. These new laws encourage the development of interoperable systems across healthcare and human service programs. During this presentation, Mr. Burt shared his program's approach and lessons learned from rolling out an integrated eligibility system. Mr. Burt first spoke about the circumstances that facilitated change in his program, which included:

- The economic downturn and decrease in state tax revenue.
- Historically high caseload growth.
- Inconsistent modernization efforts.
- Workload disparities across regions.

Facing these issues, his program focused reforms on several areas:

- **Standardizing work:** A statewide program and policy unit was put in place, as well as a performance review team that conducted quality control, case reviews, and investigations. An online operations manual was developed as well as standardized performance measures through electronic performance plans.
- **Improving customer service:** The program created a consistent delivery model, started to use one Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system statewide, and created an online "MyCase" Customer Portal. The call center model had one phone number for all programs, staffed by 500 people conducting interviews, answering status questions, processing change reports, and making determinations while on calls with customers.
- **Virtually centralizing staff:** The program switched from 35 separate offices to four call centers, 14 offices, 139 telecommuters, and 55 outreach workers. A new hierarchy was created so that teams that are best able to handle an individual's needs would be deployed for each customer.

Utah took advantage of the OMB A87 exception that is available through calendar year 2015, which allows state human services programs to benefit from IT changes associated with Medicaid expansion under the ACA. The availability of this funding is not dependent on whether a State chose to expand Medicaid or if their insurance exchange is state-based. Human services agencies can receive 90 percent funding from Medicaid to develop and update system components. This funding does not apply to



maintenance and operation. Utah used the OMB A87 exception to enhance funding for the following components of their integrated system:

- Client portals.
- User interfaces.
- Business rules engine and operating systems.
- Interactive Voice Response (IVR).

Mr. Burt then shared lessons learned from undertaking these improvements. They were:

- IT improvements do not resolve flawed procedures or operational designs.
- IT can be built to account for silo produced policy, but it is error-prone, expensive, and confusing to the customer.
- IT should not drive process; often IT will push for the easy way rather than the right way.
- Dedication of resources is a must and worth the investment for larger projects.
- Short deadlines can help.
- Parallel IT design, policy/procedure writing, and training development works best.

### [Overview of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 and the Potential Intersection with TANF](#)

- **Virginia Hamilton**, *Regional Director, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Region VI*

The focus of this session was to discuss the recent passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and what it may mean for TANF programs. Ms. Hamilton noted that WIOA was the first legislative reform of the public workforce system in more than 15 years and aims to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need.

She also discussed the White House's 'job-driven training program' agenda, which includes a checklist that aligns with the principles of WIOA. She noted that these efforts suggest an expectation that job training programs lead to jobs, and that programs use a customer-centric approach. Community colleges, adult education, vocational rehabilitation, and TANF are all required partners. However, there are still more questions than answers about what this new law means and how it will be implemented. This includes understanding what 'mandatory' partnerships mean, which could materialize in a variety of ways, such as having all partners housed in the same 'one stop' system that offers wraparound services.



## Closing

Ms. Fong and Ms. Roberto closed the workshop by soliciting feedback from participants about elements of program operations that they are thinking about modifying as a result of what they learned during the meeting. Participants from Hawaii and Nevada were particularly struck by the presentations on integrated approaches for addressing family homelessness, and looked forward to using the information shared to help them develop new approaches when they returned home. Several participants noted that Jodie Sue Kelly's presentation on engaging TANF clients is encouraging them to think about how to market the benefits of the TANF program to clients to promote participation and compliance. Representatives from Guam indicated that they would like to consider adapting some of the process and policy approaches used by Utah in the development of their integrated eligibility system. Broadly, participants reflected that the workshop gave them ample time to deeply engage in the agenda topics and to dialogue with their peers. Ms. Fong encouraged attendees to continue to reach out to the Regional Office for support and any related technical assistance or training needs.