



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy Information Session

March 4, 2014 | 2 p.m. EST

Transcribed by Pearl Interactive Network, Inc.

[female announcer]: Please stand by. Good day and welcome to the Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy conference call. Today's call is being recorded. At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Mary Roberto. Please go ahead.

[Mary Roberto]: Good day everyone. On behalf of the Office of Family Assistance I'm pleased to welcome you to today's information session on the Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy. Before we dive into content, I'm going to touch on a few webinar logistics. Today's webinar is being recorded. The slides, transcript, and recording will be posted to the OFA Peer TA network in the coming weeks. You will be notified via email when they are posted.

At any time during the presentation you can ask questions by typing into the Q&A box on the webinar platform. The Q&A box is next to the PowerPoint presentation at the right of your screen. We will address questions during the question and answer session at the end of the webinar.

I will now turn it over to Lisa Washington-Thomas, Self-Sufficiency Branch Chief at the Office of Family Assistance. Lisa?

[Lisa Washington-Thomas]: Thank you Mary. Good afternoon everyone, and thank you for joining our information session on the Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy. We are so happy to have so many state and local TANF programs participating as we discuss our Academy.

My name is Lisa Washington-Thomas and I am the Branch Chief for the Self-Sufficiency Branch in the Office of Family Assistance at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and I'll be opening today's webinar and helping to facilitate your questions and answers at the end. We designed this event as a way to share information with interested TANF agencies about the Office of Family Assistance (our acronym is OFA) Systems to Family Stability National Academy. The Academy will help TANF agencies redesign their TANF programs to better serve low-income families along a continuum from intake and assessment to employment and training support.



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Our objective over the course of the next hour will be to ensure that you understand the Systems of Family Stability National Academy objectives, key focus areas, and anticipated outcomes.

We hope that you will learn about the benefits of participating in the Academy and our expectations of participating sites. We want you to understand the key elements of the Academy nomination instructions and time frames, and have an opportunity to ask questions about the Academy, or nomination process and instructions.

Now I would like to turn this over Susan Golonka, our Deputy Director of the Office of Family Assistance, to give you a general overview of the Policy Academy. Susan?

[Susan Golonka]: Thank you Lisa. Good afternoon everyone. I guess I should say—good morning in a few locales, but again, welcome to everyone who is joining us today. And we're really excited about the interest that your participation in today's webinar demonstrates around the Policy Academy that we are soon to be launching.

So simply stated, and Lisa said it as well, the purpose of the Policy Academy is to “support state and local efforts to improve employment outcomes for TANF recipients and to strengthen service delivery to TANF families.” We see it as essentially representing the core purposes of TANF.

So what I wanted to briefly tell you about is: What is this Academy? And what is the Academy model of technical assistance and engagement that we are talking about? I previously worked at another organization that also hosted a number of policy academies, and it was particularly a useful construct for those endeavors that really required more than just one agency.

While we're talking about improving employment outcomes for TANF participants, in reality we know that it is going to require engagement with the workforce system, engaging potentially with mental health and substance abuse services, perhaps an array of community organizations, and with employers. So it really becomes much more than just a TANF agency, we need to be involved with stakeholders as well. So it's a way to bring together a group of individuals who are going to be committed to the endeavor.

So what we will do is we will be working with a select group of up to seven committed teams representing state and local TANF programs. It is, as I said, a team approach where we would anticipate you would have some key administrators, perhaps your department leader, and stakeholders from the community of your state. You might want to have a county

representative and vice-versa. It really needs to be folks who can help both design and effect change.

It's also outcome-focused. We'll talk a little bit further about some of the sorts of things that you might choose to do if you're participating. But it really is outcome-focused and action-oriented. We will work with you to help you set goals, create a strategic action plan, and initiate implementation.

You'll have opportunities to learn from your peers, and that's another big component of the Academy model—that all the teams participating will be able to learn from each other. There's a lot of cross-fertilization. We'll engage researchers and policy experts; and you'll also have coaches to help you, to facilitate you through some of the processes.

We have it planned as an 18-month engagement. But in reality, this whole effort may take you several years beyond this. So we really see this being a way that you'll start with the planning, through some initial implementation. But hopefully what will be underway is the processes that will maybe take a couple years to implement, but hopefully be sustained for several more years—if not indefinitely, after that.

The other thing I want to talk about is, “why now?” And we really think that it is a really good time to have a Policy Academy focused on improving employment outcomes. We're approaching—believe it or not—the twentieth anniversary of TANF enactment in August of 2016. And so we don't necessarily foresee a reauthorization coming along, which is often the catalyst for change. But I think a twentieth anniversary presents a good time to reflect on where the program has been, what you'd like to achieve differently, or more going ahead. So it's a good catalyst, if you will, for some real in-depth action and consideration.

I think another important factor is the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, or WIOA. As most of you know, that does require TANF to be a one-stop partner. And I think that brings also, a lot of opportunities and challenges, again, for improving employment outcomes for TANF participants. So that's an important context within which the Academy will be working.

We're also gaining new insight from research. In particular, a lot of the connection now with neuroscience in brain development and executive skills, and how does one's executive skills impact one's ability to set goals and achieve them, and to achieve employment and retain employment. So there are also issues and information around trauma-informed care, toxic

stress. How do these issues impact—while they may occur in childhood—they impact individuals as they become adults and on into adulthood.

We're also seeing new practice models and approaches in some research as well around different employment strategies, career pathways, coaching models, and integration of TANF and WIOA. So there's enough out there I think that we can consider and build upon.

Finally, we also see that there is a lot of interest. Over the past several years we've talked with a number of states and localities who are thinking holistically about how they might change and improve their TANF program. So some of them are being called redesign efforts. And some are very comprehensive and others may be more narrowly focused.

But it's our belief that from the conversations we've had there is an interest in improving TANF programs. And I think that also goes back to the fact that when we look at some of the statistics if you will, around children and poverty, and employment, and low-income communities, there's a lot that still needs to be done. And some of the numbers are not all that encouraging. For example, we know that only about 35% of eligible families nationwide are actually receiving TANF. We know that unemployment is around 20% for the lowest income families. We know that child poverty continues to be high, at the same time that we see caseloads are decreasing. And also we know that states are not spending all that much of their block grant on employment and training activities. In fact, only about six percent of the TANF block grant and the MOE dollars are spent on employment activities and about twenty-eight percent on cash assistance. So I think this Policy Academy also will provide an opportunity to think in a very deliberate manner as to how the TANF and the MOE resources are being allocated.

So, we have here a list of some of the Academy outcomes. In other words, what you might decide to do as a participant in the Academy. And you might choose to do one of these, or all of these, or several. And I think it's important to note that we're not dictating any one strategy, approach, model, or outcome. It's really about working with your state, or your team working to come up with a plan that is appropriate and meets the goals that you all have set.

Anyways, among some of the outcomes we will be hoping that you will be implementing innovative approaches to access TANF participant needs and deliver more effective case management. Adopting job-driven training approaches to provide participants with the skills and resources to obtain and retain employment in promising occupations. And I think within job-driven training that the real focus on working with employers and using labor market information data is particularly critical, as well as the notion of incorporating a career pathway

strategy within the TANF program. You may be making improvements across the continuum of employment services from job search and job readiness to post-employment support.

We also want to help you think about how you might adopt more of a two-generation approach; one that is focusing simultaneously on parental employment and child well-being—connecting your participants with home visiting and quality child care and Head Start, for example.

We also will encourage you to look at some of your internal business processes and how you deliver services as a way to making delivery more efficient, more effective, and one that aligns with your goals and strategies. And finally, the possibility of incorporating practices informed by growing knowledge of that executive functioning. And one example of that, more and more, there's a lot of discussion around coaching as an alternative to case management.

So those are just a flavor of some of the things that we would anticipate that you might be looking at and considering doing after you do an assessment of where your current program is.

So those were the policies, the practices, and the strategies that we would hope that you would consider and implement. But to do that, it's going to take some strategic implementation as well. We will be working with you and your team to help you develop a strong leadership team—to integrate planning, performance measurement, and evaluation into the design of your full effort. We imagine it will require you to develop new or enhance existing strategic partnerships, one of course being with the workforce system.

I mentioned earlier the notion streamlining and modernizing processes, and even some of your policies—and here's where you might find some savings that could be funds then redirected towards other parts of your unit's efforts. We imagine you might have to strengthen some of your staff skills in capacities and knowledge as you take on a more in-depth effort. And then hopefully, you'll be better using your fiscal and human resources. So, these are also aspects of what we'll be providing you with information and assisting you with.

So with that, I'm going to turn it back to Lisa and she's going to provide more of the details of what it means to participate, and what it takes to be selected.

[Lisa Washington-Thomas]: Thanks Susan. So, who is eligible? We are looking for state, territory, or local TANF programs. And what we're hoping to do and—we're looking for a diverse cohort of sites. And we hope it will include a combination of state and local programs, as well as sites who are in different stages of reengineering their program. So we're looking to have some of those who have entered the reengineering process and want to continue on that

continuum, as well as those who are just initiating the process, but are deeply committed [to] changing their program.

Susan has touched on the benefits of participation, but I just want to reemphasize: The participants will participate in two Academy meetings in Washington, D.C. One will be in 2015, so we're planning mid to late June, and the other will be in 2016 as a touch-base before we close the in-person Academy,

At the Academy you will engage peers, subject matter experts, and policy leads on implementation activities. You will also be exposed to emerging and relevant research and best practices, as well as many experts who can take you through and help you with your implementing different practices. The selected sites will [have] experienced coaching teams to help guide site leadership and home-based teams through the process of developing and implementing strategic action plans, including conducting initial program assessment, and the creation of benchmark and measurable outcome. You will also participate, or have the ability to participate, with peer-to-peer learning and virtual and on-site opportunities.

So we have expectations of the sites. We hope you will have at least three key leaders in TANF or other relevant agencies who attend the two Academy meetings in 2015 and 2016. OFA will cover the cost for up to three individuals to participate, and each site will be allowed to bring three additional people at their expense.

We also expect that the collective sites will build a comprehensive home team that includes leaders from relevant states and/or local partners, or partners in their internal structure, such as workforce development, adult education, childcare, transportation, and other agencies deemed appropriate to meet your team's objectives. Each site's home team is expected to participate in on-site planning meetings, the initial on-site consultation, and periodic on-site and virtual coaching, conference calls and other activities.

You will need to have at least one staff person participate in up to six training or virtual events; work with your OFA colleagues and TA Coaches to develop a statement of goals; assess gaps and develop action plans; and participate in regularly—we're anticipating quarterly communications with OFA, post-Academy—on action plan progress and outcomes. As Susan mentioned the Academy is expected to last about 18 months, but some of your implementation might go on longer than that.

So we are participating in a nomination process. OFA is interested in partnering with organizations who are truly committed to achieving successful outcomes, and people [who] are

willing to roll up their sleeves and participate throughout the 18-month process to achieve a broader participation, so we chose not to select entities that we have previously known about. We're casting a wider net and seeking nominees with a capacity to implement change, and who have demonstrated interest in improving TANF employment outcomes and service delivery.

OFA is interested in nominations of state, county, and territory TANF agencies that are interested in one or more of the substantive areas that have been discussed earlier. And we will gladly accept self-nominations. We anticipate up to seven—again, state, county, or territory agencies—will be selected.

Our nomination process—We anticipate, or we would like to receive, a narrative no more than five pages that will have a letter of commitment from the nominee. And it should also include a point of contact for the nominee including his or her title, organization, address, phone number, and email address. And we would like to see a narrative that will discuss the nominee's organizational capacity to participate in the Academy, evidence of the nominee's readiness and interest to participate relative to the subject areas that we discussed, [and] the nominee's desired outcome for participating in the academy. OFA will consider all of those factors, but we will also be looking for diversity in geography, as well as administrative structures, when we choose the site. We may contact the nominees directly to gain additional information as we enter the review process.

We want to discuss important dates. Nominations are due at March 17th at 11:59 p.m. Eastern time. We will notify the selected sites by the end of March or early April. And then we are expecting that you will have a visit from a TA Coach who will be on site between April and May 2015. And the first National Academy will occur in Washington, D.C. in mid-June.

So I'm going to turn this over to Damon Waters who will moderate any questions and answers that we may have.

[Damon Waters]: Thanks, Lisa. One question came in—Are Tribal TANF programs and other entities other than state or local TANF programs are able to [participate], like a CAP agency or WIOA agency?

[Lisa Washington-Thomas]: As we said, we're only looking for a TANF agency. Now, depending on what their priority is, they may have to partner with a CAP agency or WIOA partners. As far as the Tribal TANF program, some of their administrative structures are slightly different than the state programs, and we are planning to have an Academy in the near future that will allow states to partner with like organizations as they think about reengineering their process.

We have one more question, we're just trying to get the—bear with us we're having computer difficulties, but we see that questions are coming in.

[Lisa Washington-Thomas]: While we're trying to find the questions and answers, one thing I would like to reiterate is that the slides and the transcript of this webinar will be on the Peer TA website as soon as we are able to meet the 508 compliance requirement, so that you'll be able to refer back.

[Damon Waters]: A question came in about the Policy Academy meetings. Could you provide a little more information about what will be going on during that time?

[Susan Golonka]: Okay, thanks. That's a good question. So first let me premise it. Lisa had noted that prior to the first Academy meeting, your team will convene with a coach who will start some initial discussions with your team, do some initial assessments of your current program and discussions around some of the goals and objectives you'd like to accomplish. Then your team will come to Washington, D.C. in mid-June, and during that time it's really—I would say—multiple things will be occurring. One is that there will be considerable time where you will be working with your team to further refine your strategic plan, and that will be always an iterative process. But by the time you leave that first meeting, you'll have a clear direction about what are some things you're going to be doing in the first three to six months, as well as what ongoing planning activities you'll need to do, and implementation activities that may come later.

We recognize that for some state or counties that might be embarking on a fairly comprehensive initiative, they may need to actually implement sort of a broad-based stakeholder input process, initially, but perhaps at the same time, there may be some more modest efforts that could go on in terms of implementing practices or policies.

So there will be considerable team time. Then there's also going to be a lot of access to experts in the field, researchers, other folks in states and counties who have moved ahead with doing various reform effort[s]. These will be formal presentations, but also [with] lots of opportunities to engage in conversations with these individuals, either with your team or during the presentation.

And then finally, there will be a lot of cross-fertilization, peer-to-peer sharing, where you all will—the teams selected—will meet with each other, share their strategies and ideas, challenges, and learn from each other's experiences.



So that's kind of the main thrust of the Academy. It's a very intense couple of days, and as Lisa had noted we unfortunately have only the resources to pay for three of your team, but we really are hopeful that you might be able to support attendance with your own resources.

[Damon Waters]: Another question came about some of the virtual and on-site TA that selected activities that sites can potentially receive.

[Lisa Washington-Thomas]: It will depend on the site. We have not structured those yet because, as each site is working with their coach, we will develop a needs assessment and determine what are their needs, and based on that we'll develop webinars and virtual activities to address those needs.

[Damon Waters]: We have a question. Can you give more details on what you are looking for in the narrative?

[Susan Golonka]: I think an assessment of where your program is, and what do you think the current strengths and weaknesses are. And you might use data for that in terms of what employment outcomes are you achieving; what work participation rate, if that is something you are focusing on; if you have data around retention [sic]—any sort of information that gives you an assessment of where you think your program's current strengths and challenges lie. Then, what it is you think you would like to improve. And then if you can talk about to what extent you have made some in-roads, or even an exploratory effort around these issues; and whether you have support from key leadership—the secretary level, the governor level if applicable, your stakeholder community, your allied agencies. Partly because of federal rules, we weren't able to do a real formal list-out of detailed application requirements, but it's almost common sense. You want to pitch to us why you would like to participate.

[Damon Waters]: Is the submission by email, snail mail, or online?

[Lisa Washington-Thomas]: It will be via email and submissions will be going to Damon Waters, our moderator, and his email address—it's in the letter and Academy overview, but in case you don't have that readily available—it's damon.waters@acf.hhs.gov.

[Susan Golonka]: And I would just say we will also provide a response back once we receive that. If you don't receive a confirmation email, then you'll want to follow up.

Again, just to clarify, Tribal TANF programs are not eligible for this particular Policy Academy. We just felt that because of the different sort of requirements and structure, that it was better

not to blend the two; but this also gives us an opportunity to think down the road about a similar intensive sort of engagement like a Policy Academy with tribes.

[Damon Waters]: Will the slides be available online, and what's the webinar link for this?

[Lisa Washington-Thomas]: So everyone who registered will receive an email stating that the slides are posted on the Peer TA website with a link, [and] those that are in the Peer TA email Listserv will also then receive a separate email.

[Damon Waters]: Will there be any flexibility in regards to work participation requirements?

[Susan Golonka]: We don't have the authority to modify the work participation requirements, but note: this really is to explore what one can do within the current structure of the TANF block grant. So we will explore with you, if you want to do more education or create a career pathway or whatever, how best to design that so that you potentially can meet the work participation rate and achieve the goals that you've set out. And that's certainly an area where experiences from other states are very helpful.

[Damon Waters]: Do you have any recommendations [as] to the number of members on the state team?

[Susan Golonka]: Well, you know that is pretty state- or site-specific, and I will also say it may change over time. I think we talked about a core group—and the core group being those folks who travel to the meetings. I would say you don't even have to have it all worked out initially as to who might be on your broader team, but I think you have to think about who would need to be your key partners as you go to implement your plan. Are there particular stakeholder groups who are going to be essential to be involved in the design? Are there researchers? One of the aspects we haven't talked a lot about, but we will be working with you to develop from the beginning a process and an on-going rapid response evaluation, so you might want to have some folks from the research community. And it could even be at some point along the way maybe a state legislator. I think you will want to develop a group that you know for sure that need[s] to be on it, and then as you move along, you may engage more folks.

[Damon Waters]: Would you be interested in nominees that are operating smaller pilot programs around TANF redesign, or would nominees committing to complete redesign of their TANF program be preferred?

[Susan Golonka]: I think we want a sort of representation. We are not, per se, looking for everyone to fully implement a broad-expansion redesign. Our hope is that change will happen,

positive change will happen by the engagement; and to some degree, what is realistic will vary across jurisdictions. So, no. And let me just say even if a particular jurisdiction is focusing on a smaller effort, it's likely someone who is doing a broader effort, they may well share some of the same issues anyways.

[Damon Waters]: There's a couple questions [about] clarity around the nomination process. Is there a template? Is there anything that hasn't been discussed that should be in the nomination format for submission?

[Susan Golonka]: We don't have a template per se, but I think if you look at the information package that we have identified some of the area[s], and Lisa did as well, and I think it's worth writing around those, organizing them in a logical manner. And if you only answer the questions on the site, again I would say to put any information that you think demonstrates your interest, commitment, and what you've done so far.

[Damon Waters]: Often key program changes require funding. Is there any funding or grant opportunities to support states' reengineering initiatives?

[Susan Golonka]: Well I wish there was, from us, but no. Unfortunately we don't have funds for you. But I think again, part of your strategy might be to look for other funding opportunities, with philanthropy, with other parts of ACF or HHS or Labor, that might, for example, be able to help you with pilots or research.

And then—your effort is such that you are able to develop a persuasive argument so that some funds of your TANF block grant might be reallocated towards this effort. And one of the things we have found as we've talked more and more with states and secretaries, and policy folks and governor's offices—they don't really understand how little of the TANF block grant may actually be going to what one might consider the traditional cash assistance and employment and training efforts. So, that could be part of your strategy: to explore ways to have your block grant have a little bit of reallocation at least.

[Damon Waters]: How far along, if at all, must an applicant be in planning for TANF redesign or another issue area in hopes to explore and implement through the Academy?

[Lisa Washington-Thomas]: We are looking for diversity. We're hoping to have sites or opportunities or environments so people can share their experiences. We are looking for some sites who have been further along, who have been working on reengineering and want to continue that process, and we are looking for some who are newly, or beginning to think about reengineering. They've done some of their homework, but they need kind of a blast to provide

opportunities for them to truly think and hash out their processing. So, we're looking across the continuum.

[Damon Waters]: What kind of data, if any, must applicants share in their proposal to show their level of need, commitments, or interest in a particular topic area?

[Susan Golonka]: Any data that makes your point. I think it's valuable—it's hard to say what data would necessarily be relevant to your case, but if you have it, I would say use it and more power to you. It will strengthen your application. But I also understand that there may not necessarily be the relevant data available based on that.

[Damon Waters]: Between the three focus areas, are there preferred partners that TANF programs may want to consider reaching out to in applying for the Academy?

[Susan Golonka]: I think, again, each state's or county's circumstances will be different, and again depending on your focus area, but I would say oftentimes with employment, the work connections for the workforce systems, connections to the adult education system, your community college system, might be relevant. If you're particularly interested in redesign of case management and assessment and addressing some of the barriers that might not be education or employment focus, then you might want to reach out to your substance abuse and mental health partners. I think that will kind of depend on where your interest and focus lies. If you're a state, with a county administered system you might want to engage county representation in some fashion. Kind of varies.

[Damon Waters]: I'll turn it back over to Susan to close us out.

[Susan Golonka]: So, I hope we've answered your questions, and if you have additional questions that come up, certainly please feel free to reach out to Damon and Lisa or myself [and] we will be happy to do the best we can in answering them. And we really are thrilled. We hope you see this as an opportunity. We believe there is so much interest now, as well as richness—and it's already occurring—richness in the sort of research and new ways of thinking about how to address some challenges that participants have. We think the time is ripe to engage in this sort of activity, and the opportunity to learn from each other is always a great benefit, and we just look forward to it, and also engaging ICF, our contractor, that is helping us work on this. We'll be engaging other researchers and experts as faculty members, as coaches, and as resources to support you.

So there's one last question we see: for states that are not selected, will there be updates about what is happening [and] ideas being generated? I think this is a great question, and the



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answer is yes. In fact, as we have webinars that might be designed to address some of the issues or interests of Policy Academy states, we could well imagine that those webinars will be open to everyone. We hope that the whole experience will generate ideas both as we are doing it and certainly at the conclusion, so we do intend to provide shared learning experiences for everyone.

Okay, and then there's one more question: Is there a particular format we should follow for the narrative nomination, or is this merely a letter that indicates a commitment from the nominee?

So what we were really anticipating was that there would—again, because whether or not the nominee may be itself or it may be someone else nominating the nominee—we're anticipating a letter, and then an attached narrative. But we wouldn't throw you out either if you did it all in one form.

Alright, so I do think that's it, and again let me say thank you everyone. Please feel free to follow up with questions, and we think it's going to be a great opportunity and we hope you do too.

Thank you Lisa. Thank you Damon.

[female announcer]: This does conclude today's presentation. We thank you for your participation.