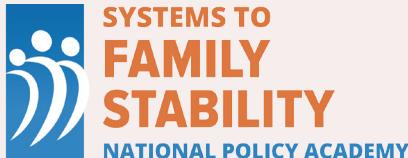




# MARYLAND

## *Modernizing TANF for American Families*



### **Supportive Technical Assistance and Coaching Through the Policy Academy Model**

For Maryland, the Policy Academy provided a helpful and necessary infrastructure for bringing together key state-level workforce and social services partners to develop a realistic and sustainable inter-departmental state plan in response to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The Policy Academy gave the team a venue for learning about each agency's work and who it serves, as well as a platform for "continually working together until it became habit," said Erin Roth, Director of Policy for the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning at the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. Through the process, the team developed shared goals and clear action steps toward its vision of increasing the earning capacity of Maryland's vulnerable families. The coaches and expert consultants provided the team with needed support while Maryland navigated new WIOA requirements, created its state workforce plan, and engaged local workforce areas in a thoughtful implementation process.



The Office of Family Assistance's (OFA) Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy (Policy Academy) was an 18-month intensive technical assistance (TA) initiative in 2015–2016 for seven states and one county interested in modernizing and improving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) practice. During the initiative, sites received dedicated coaches, onsite strategic planning, access to expert consultants, and tailored written resources. Additionally, they participated in several in-person convenings, peer exchanges, and virtual training.

The Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR)<sup>1</sup> saw the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014 as an opportunity to strengthen state and local partnerships between workforce systems and TANF. In response to WIOA and under the direction of Governor Larry Hogan, DHR, its counterpart charged with implementing the new law—the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR)—and partners developed a state plan that coordinated service delivery for shared participants with employment barriers. However, both agencies were uncertain about how they would formalize state and local TANF–workforce partnerships given their separate policies, performance measures, and participant-support systems. Governor Hogan's charge to state agencies implementing WIOA was to collaborate and innovate in providing quality workforce training and employment opportunities. Erin Roth, Director of Policy for the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning at DLLR, said, "It felt almost improbable that we could get multiple agencies to issue guidance together and to agree with it."

Maryland's DHR leveraged the Policy Academy's technical assistance on TANF–workforce system collaboration to build and implement its WIOA state plan. Through careful development and implementation, the team hoped its plan would lead to increased earning capacities among Maryland's most vulnerable families by integrating service delivery between TANF and workforce programs. Maryland's Policy Academy team included leadership from DHR and DLLR, representatives from the Governor's Workforce Development Board (the Governor's chief policy-making body for workforce development), and representatives from Baltimore City social services and workforce development offices (which serve the largest percentage of Maryland's TANF participants). The team also included DHR's long-time evaluation partner, the University of Maryland, which helped it consider how to develop and track shared outcome measures given each department's different data collection methods.

From the onset, the team focused on building a strong and sustainable coalition by clarifying misperceptions about each other's work, including each partner's workforce goals, business processes, and TANF participants' needs and interests. "We had to be honest at the beginning about our perceptions of each other's work before we could move forward to identify shared values and goals," said Roth. This openness proved critical for the team members' successful collaboration ahead, but also spurred them to dig deeper and learn more about how they serve similar participants and why each agency was at the table, said Sara Muempfer, then Director of Workforce Development at DHR.

***"We had to be honest at the beginning about our perceptions of each other's work before we could move forward to identify shared values and goals."***

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<sup>1</sup>Effective July 2017, DHR changed its name to the Department of Human Services. For purposes of this profile, DHR will be used to reflect the organization's name at the time of the Policy Academy.





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To better understand local processes and service supports, Policy Academy team members visited local workforce one-stop centers and departments of social services. Around the same time, the University of Maryland developed 12 different snapshots of TANF participants, one for each of the state's 12 local workforce areas, to help identify common characteristics between TANF and other workforce system customers. Seeing the value in sharing the snapshots more broadly, team members pooled their respective email lists across state and local agencies and created what would become a critical dissemination vehicle through which information would be shared over the course of the state's WIOA implementation efforts. Team members returned to these email-based lists many times during the 18-month Academy—to solicit feedback and maintain regular lines of communication between TANF and workforce partners at all levels.

Armed with a more nuanced understanding of each system's goals and processes, as well as feedback from local departments, DLLR, DHR and their partners, at Governor Hogan's direction, submitted their WIOA State Combined Workforce Plan to the U.S. Department of Labor. After the plan was approved in 2016, "our next step was to provide specific and detailed guidance on how local workforce areas could bring their TANF–workforce partnerships to fruition," said Roth. Team members tapped expert consultants through the Academy to help review how local TANF–workforce systems were currently operating and develop and administer an online readiness survey completed by the 24 local departments of social services and the 12 local workforce areas. They learned there was great variability in the level of collaboration between local TANF and workforce systems across the state. Local agencies also said that they needed support from the state to help improve collaboration and realize the state's integrated service delivery goals.

Team members began efforts to arm local areas with the tools needed to implement the state plan. First, they developed flexible guidance, with local input, which allowed for phased implementation and met each local area where they were in their current TANF–workforce collaborations. Next, they hosted two statewide WIOA convenings, encouraging local areas to invite stakeholders that would comprise that jurisdiction's local WIOA implementation team. During the summer 2016 convening, local teams—with the state plan and implementation guidelines in hand—began to fashion their own jurisdiction-specific TANF–workforce coordination plans and deepen their understanding of the work ahead.

As local jurisdictions went home and refined their plans, the Policy Academy team began to think about how to measure beyond what was statutorily required for success. In the process, it also became more acutely aware of the challenges local areas were facing. The Academy team drafted benchmarks and indicators to realize the state's WIOA goals, focusing on participant (e.g., earning, career development, educational attainment) and systemic (e.g., shared case management tools, data sharing) measures.

Maryland has begun an aggressive engagement of its local teams in the ongoing planning for WIOA implementation. It has invited many local areas to the Policy Academy team itself to ensure a diverse set of voices were heard and could inform how the team offered customers holistic support. The team continues to refine its draft benchmarks, as well as assess ways to integrate statewide data systems to collect and share data effectively to determine whether the benchmarks have been achieved. "We have a framework today, where our state and local teams are truly moving ahead—together—to create the systemic change we have been hoping for in Maryland," said Roth.



### **Highlights from Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy Sites**

When asked about a bright spot in their Academy experience, Maryland leaders said they were pleased with how multiple state departments came together to respond collaboratively to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) requirements, despite each department's different policies, practices, and data collection methods. Using the Policy Academy to bring together key state-level WIOA partners, the team created and implemented a plan that outlined how their TANF–workforce partnerships would align. The team also created a framework for regular engagement and feedback from numerous state and local partners—creating a model of inter-departmental collaboration that continues today as partners devise data sharing agreements and identify ways to integrate data collection methods. In reflecting on her team's accomplishments, Sara Muempfer, then Director of Workforce Development at DHR explained, "The Maryland WIOA State Workforce Plan was the result of over a year of challenging conversations and hard work that led to a policy on MOUs and RSAs (<http://www.dllr.state.md.us/employment/mpi/mpi9-16.pdf>) jointly issued by multiple departments and blessed by the Governor's Workforce Development Board—a huge win for us!"

