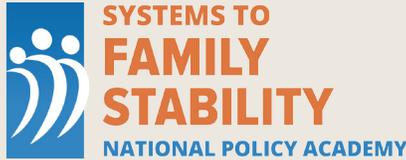


WASHINGTON

Modernizing TANF for American Families



Supportive Technical Assistance and Coaching Through the Policy Academy Model

For Washington State’s Department of Social and Health Services team, the technical assistance offered through the Policy Academy was critical in helping it frame how to work toward supporting families’ progress on a complicated “Self-Sufficiency Superhighway.” “It gave us an approach,” said Community Services Division (CSD) Staff Development and Training Manager Bill Callahan, “where we could allow for local innovation, but also offer state-level supports, guidance, and resources.” Jenny Grayum, CSD’s Policy Academy Project Manager, said “the coaching model was particularly helpful. Just as the national level coaches supported the state, state level coaches helped build the capacity of our local pilots and gave local staff a crucial sense of ownership over their change process.” The team also valued the connections with fellow National Policy Academy sites. Hearing from other states and counties that were facing similar challenges helped them identify new strategies, and also illustrated the value in ensuring Washington’s 16 local pilots had similar peer exchange opportunities over the course of the initiative.



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, on-site strategic planning, access to expert consultants, and tailored written resources. Additionally, they participated in several in-person convenings, peer exchanges, and virtual training.

In the spring of 2015, leaders from across Washington State’s Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)—led by its Community Services Division (CSD) Director Babette Roberts—hosted a multi-day strategic planning session to decide how they would implement CSD’s vision to transform case management for TANF participants. As one of the eight programs participating in the Policy Academy, the Washington State team was ready to make its “Self-Sufficiency Superhighway” a reality. The Superhighway, said Roberts, is a visual representation “of the world our clients face,” but also shows how the state can assist them with “enough barrier removal assistance, enough social capital development, enough supports and education and training to not only achieve self-sufficiency, but sustain it.” The Superhighway concept, which pre-dated the state’s Policy Academy work, brought together several streams of focus for DSHS—its work around TANF reform, intergenerational poverty, and science-based supports for vulnerable children (see Figure 1).

Washington’s Superhighway vision was closely aligned with the Policy Academy’s focus areas of whole family engagement, improved case management or coaching systems, and TANF–workforce alignment. Intrigued by the Policy Academy model of systems reform, the Washington team decided to replicate the Academy concept with a series of local pilots, which received state-level coaching and peer support to foster innovation and evaluate change to realize their Superhighway vision.

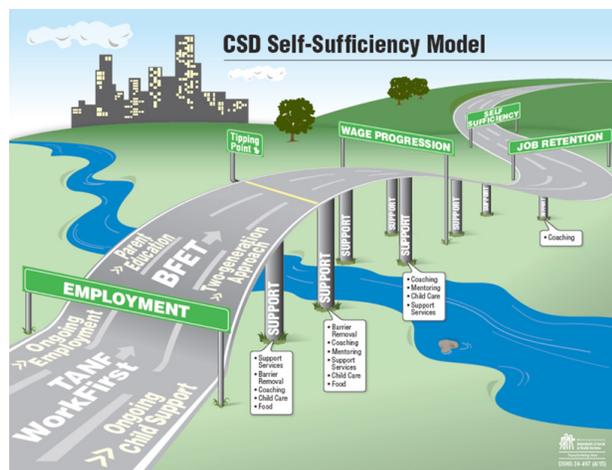


Figure 1. Washington’s Superhighway Model

Reviewing past research and current state-level TANF data, the team identified the challenges and opportunities presented by families with multiple episodes of TANF dependence—“cyclers,” which represent about 40 percent of the total caseload. CSD’s Staff Development and Training Manager Bill Callahan said, “We know many are leavers... We also know many stay on, and the latter face a host of co-existing barriers we cannot fully address during the 18-month Academy.” But the cyclers, he added, fall in between long-term and short-term dependence. The Policy Academy would help the state discern what additional, time-bound support cyclers need to sustain self-sufficiency.

The team also targeted disconnected young people with the idea of intervening early in their experience with the TANF program to reduce the risk of long-term dependency. It was believed that these younger TANF recipients—who represent about one-third of the Washington caseload—would benefit from the increased emphasis on disengaged youth

Continued on page 2.



WASHINGTON

Modernizing TANF for American Families



in the recently adopted Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This TANF-WIOA connection, it was thought, might present opportunities for greater synergy and improved performance for both programs.

For each target population, the state would test coaching case management approaches, community partnership strengthening focused on TANF-workforce system linkages, and whole family supports. In early 2016, Washington selected 16 proposals from across 25 local Community Service Offices (CSOs) to pilot a range of service enhancements. Using a self-nomination process that mirrored the Policy Academy, Washington encouraged CSOs to propose pilot programs that were consistent with overall project goals and tailored to the unique circumstances of each jurisdiction. In promoting the 12-month pilot opportunity to CSOs, Roberts was clear: “This is a chance for creativity. Be brave, be bold...and know you have a safe space to fail.” Undergirded by these principles, Washington assigned a dedicated state-level coach to each CSO to provide technical assistance and guidance. Each site began pilot implementation in spring 2016. Based on a request by CSOs for training that would help staff with new approaches to working with families, Washington trained approximately 200 staff members on emerging brain science, the lifelong impacts of adverse childhood experiences, and helping to build resilience in TANF families. Each pilot developed a logic model or roadmap to guide project implementation focused on creating clear linkages between desired outcomes and program inputs and activities. As of March 2017, approximately 1,700 TANF participants had engaged in a pilot intervention, including new parent education programs, enhanced and trauma-informed coaching case management, specialized “warm hand-offs” to new community partner agencies, or services tailored to young clients.

▶▶▶ *“Be brave, be bold...and know you have a safe space to fail.”*

Success, however, as Roberts shared with pilot CSOs, “doesn’t always come easy.” As pilots progressed, coaches and teams saw where project designs needed refinement and made mid-course corrections using a rapid-cycle learning approach. In some instances, those refinements required revisiting how pilots initially engaged TANF participants—letting participants guide goal setting, explaining how and why this was different from “business as usual,” and sharing explicitly the opportunities voluntary participation entailed. In others, it required additional time and sustained outreach to community partners to establish new memoranda of understanding that clearly articulated shared goals and agency responsibilities. CSD’s Administrator on Intergenerational Poverty Prevention, Susan Kavanaugh, noted the pilots also required strong leadership at the local level. “Some of our pilots are small,” she explained, “relying on one or two case managers—if someone falls ill or leaves the organization, it could stall pilot efforts without the CSO Administrator’s support to adjust workloads and continue the effort.”

As pilot efforts formally wind down in 2017, DSHS will move into its next phase—evaluating learnings from the pilots, along with data related to poverty mitigation strategies. While DSHS has encouraged pilot CSOs to continue with their innovative changes, the state Policy Academy team will undertake its analysis efforts to begin a long-term process of state-wide transformation of TANF case management. Connecting with other state agencies and divisions within DSHS, CSD will carefully assess which pilot approaches were effective in improving participant engagement, ensuring access to support services, and building more effective, individualized responsibility plans as methods for increasing employment and reducing cycling. This several-month period of reflection, Roberts said, will help the state identify which service model and interventions “are most likely to garner long-term success for our clients” by transforming TANF case management, empowering TANF staff, and ultimately helping families move along a Self-Sufficiency Superhighway.



Highlights from Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy Sites

When asked about a bright spot in her Academy experience, Community Services Division (CSD) Policy Academy Project Manager Jenny Grayum noted the large percentage of local Community Service Offices (CSOs) that applied to participate in Washington’s Policy Academy initiative. They were offered coaching and support from state leadership and staff, but no new funding, she added. They would test new, innovative approaches—of their own design—with existing funds and without changes to their work participation rate requirements. The Washington team saw this high level of interest as indicative of why Policy Academy pilot efforts have succeeded: CSOs were energized by the prospect of testing new approaches and being able to create them based on local need. None of the CSOs, Grayum said, have backed out or stopped their pilots, and many plan to continue their pilot interventions after the formal state-level Academy ends. “This is definitely a team effort,” said CSD Director Babette Roberts—across CSOs, with local partners, and across Department of Social and Health Services divisions, supporting local-level innovation that can lead to state-level transformation.