



## OFA State and Tribal Technical Assistance and Resources *Centering Racial Equity in TANF Data Use*

### SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

#### **Ben Jaques-Leslie**, *Research Scientist, Minnesota Department of Human Services*

Ben Jaques-Leslie is a Research Scientist in the research unit of the Economic Assistance and Employment Supports Division at the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Mr. Jaques-Leslie has a Master's in International Development and Non-Profit Management from the University of California at San Diego and a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from the University of North Carolina.

#### **Alex Pennington**, *Senior Social Science Analyst, TANF Data Division, Office of Family Assistance*

Alex Pennington works within OFA's TANF Data Division, and her role includes serving as the technical lead for the TANF Data Portal (a new federal reporting system currently under development), performing TANF data analysis, and providing technical assistance with TANF data to grantees and research partners. Prior to joining the Federal Government, Ms. Pennington was with MDRC for 14 years as a quantitative researcher, where her work focused on administrative data and the social safety net, especially TANF and other employment-focused programs. Ms. Pennington holds a Master's in Public Policy from the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University and earned her Bachelor's in Economics and Mathematics from the University of Notre Dame.

#### **Melissa Wavelet**, *Senior Fellow, MDRC*

Melissa Wavelet joined MDRC as a Senior Fellow in 2019 from the Colorado Department of Human Services, where she was the Director of the Office of Performance and Strategic Outcomes since 2013. In that executive role, she managed efforts to leverage all kinds of data (e.g., audit, budget, quality assurance, and performance) to improve program practice, policies, and outcomes for the children and families of Colorado. Prior to that, she was in similar leadership roles at the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and the New York City agency responsible for implementation of the Workforce Investment Act. She oversaw the design, implementation, and continuous improvement of the performance management systems including performance-based contracts and PerformanceStat approaches. She is the author of [A Practitioner's Framework for Measuring Results: Using "C-Stat" at the Colorado Department of Human Services](#). She currently leads a federally-funded pilot initiative of eight state human services agencies. She earned a B.A. in political science and Spanish from Marquette University and an M.A. in public management from the Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service at New York University.

#### **Sharon Zanti**, *Doctoral Fellow, Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy, School of Social Policy & Practice, University of Pennsylvania*

Sharon Zanti is a PhD student in social welfare who works with Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy to study the implementation and application of integrated data systems. She previously served as a Performance Analyst for children, youth, and family programs at the Colorado Department of Human Services. In addition, Ms. Zanti worked with Colorado county partners on performance improvement efforts and completed a research fellowship analyzing adult protective services data. She holds a



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Master's in Social Work from the University of Denver. Prior to pursuing social work, she worked as a project coordinator in the software industry and earned a B.S. in Commerce from the University of Virginia.