

# Building Strategic Partnerships with Child Welfare Services Learning Collaborative: *Synthesis of Activities and Findings*

Office of Family Assistance

Janelle Jones, *Federal Lead*  
Kataney Prior, Jose Aguayo, Jonathan McCay  
and Jeanette Holdbrook, *Mathematica*

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# Motivation for the Collaborative

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- / **“If families with low incomes experience at least one type of material hardship, there is a three times higher likelihood of a neglect investigation and a four times increased likelihood of a physical abuse investigation.”**
- / **“Each additional \$100 monthly in a state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash benefit level is [associated with] 1.8 fewer occasions of mothers reporting physically maltreating their child.”**

1. Mi-Youn Yang, “The effect of material hardship on child protective service involvement,” *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Vol. 41, March 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2014.05.009>.
2. Rachel A. Spencer et al., “Association between Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child maltreatment among a cohort of fragile families,” *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Vol. 120, October 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105186>.
3. Shrivastava, A. and Patel, U. “Research Reinforces: Providing Cash to Families in Poverty Reduces Risk of Family Involvement in Child Welfare” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 2023.



# Vision

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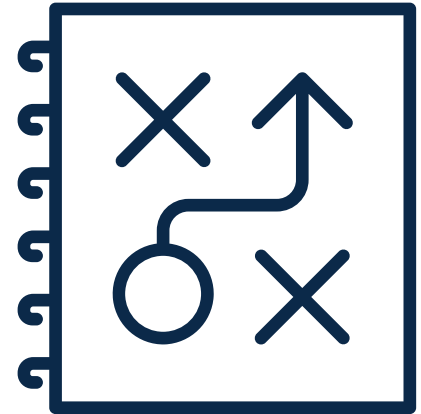
**/ Prepare states to partner with child welfare (CW) services to explore a key area for upstream prevention.**



# Strategies

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- / **Increase awareness of connections between TANF and child welfare policies and programming.**
- / **Identify and increase understanding of systematic approaches that support upstream prevention.**
- / **Identify opportunities for TANF-child welfare collaboration that promote whole-family well-being.**
- / **Identify strategies to increase the provision of economic and concrete supports in TANF programs.**



# Collaborators

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- / **Participants brought their expertise as TANF and child welfare program administrators supporting policy, eligibility, child protective services (CPS) and operations.**
- / **The states represented both state- and county-administered TANF programs.**
- / **An average of 12 participants from six states committed to the collaborative.**

## **Region I**

- / Massachusetts
- / Vermont

## **Region II**

- / New Jersey\*

## **Region IV**

- / Alabama
- / North Carolina\*

## **Region V**

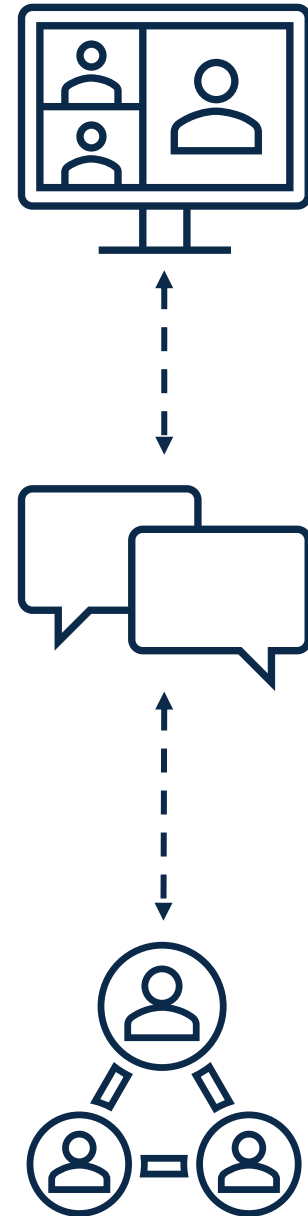
- / Wisconsin

\*Indicates county-administered TANF programs

# Structure

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- / **Participating sites met monthly for six months (March to August 2024).**
  - Each virtual meeting lasted 60 to 90 minutes.
- / **Sessions featured content presentations, full group and breakout group discussions, peer sharing, and brainstorming using human-centered design activities.**



# Topics Covered

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- ✓ **Understanding the history of child welfare's legislation and finances.**
- ✓ **Reading research on the potential prevention of child maltreatment from economic and concrete supports.**
- ✓ **Identifying opportunities for prevention-focused collaboration.**
- ✓ **Identifying strategies for integrating child welfare prevention activities into TANF programs.**



# Session 1: Anchoring Barriers in Lived Experiences



# Investing in Families

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- / When asked about their “why” in participating in the learning collaborative, states shared the following:**
- **To refocus the target(s) of CW and TANF to be about children;**
  - **To combat assumptions and biases within state government about CW and TANF programs;**
  - **To be able to share promising evidence to demonstrate that investing more in CW and TANF programs will improve participant outcomes;**
  - **To gain insight into what to include in contracts with service providers and what to consider in budgeting; and**
  - **To encourage and set an expectation that staff must come together and discuss case plans and families.**

# **Session 2: A Complex System: Current Issues and Legislative History in Child Welfare**

# “Prevention is Sought-After, but Elusive”

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**Matt Stagner presented on the legislative history of CW policy to increase states’ understanding of how such federal policies contribute to the current state of CW services. He highlighted the following points:**

- **CW is a complex, multi-faceted system that varies state to state;**
- **Many children touch the system;**
- **Most in the system have issues related to financial need; and**
- **Prevention is sought-after, but elusive.**



# Opportunities

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## States learned about Child Welfare's Prevention Continuum that discusses prevention work in three tiers:

- / **Primary Prevention: Services that are applicable to the general population.**
- / **Secondary Prevention: Services for individuals or families that have one or more risk factors.**
- / **Tertiary Prevention: Services specific to families when child maltreatment has occurred.**

## States shared the opportunities they see for their TANF and CW partnerships:

- / **A Fatherhood Program that provides secondary prevention services and similar tiered supports for mothers.**
- / **Building a whole-family requirement in TANF that could include primary and secondary prevention strategies.**
- / **Focus on primary prevention services in a state where TANF and CW programs are administered at the county and state level, respectively.**
- / **How TANF can support families with housing needs.**
- / **Prevention strategies to integrate into TANF modernization efforts, supported by increased data sharing across agencies.**

**Session 3: Child and  
Family Well-being System:  
Economic and Concrete  
Supports as a Core  
Component**

# Economic and Concrete Supports as Prevention

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**Clare Anderson presented on economic and concrete supports as a core component for improving service delivery and identifying opportunities for collaboration with CW services.**

**She offered three strategies for states to use evidence when requesting more funding or programmatic changes to develop economic supports:**

- 1) Identifying the audience and understanding their motivations.**
- 2) Engaging in one-on-one conversations with legislators to understand different perspectives.**
- 3) Building relationships to motivate a need for change and to collaborate.**

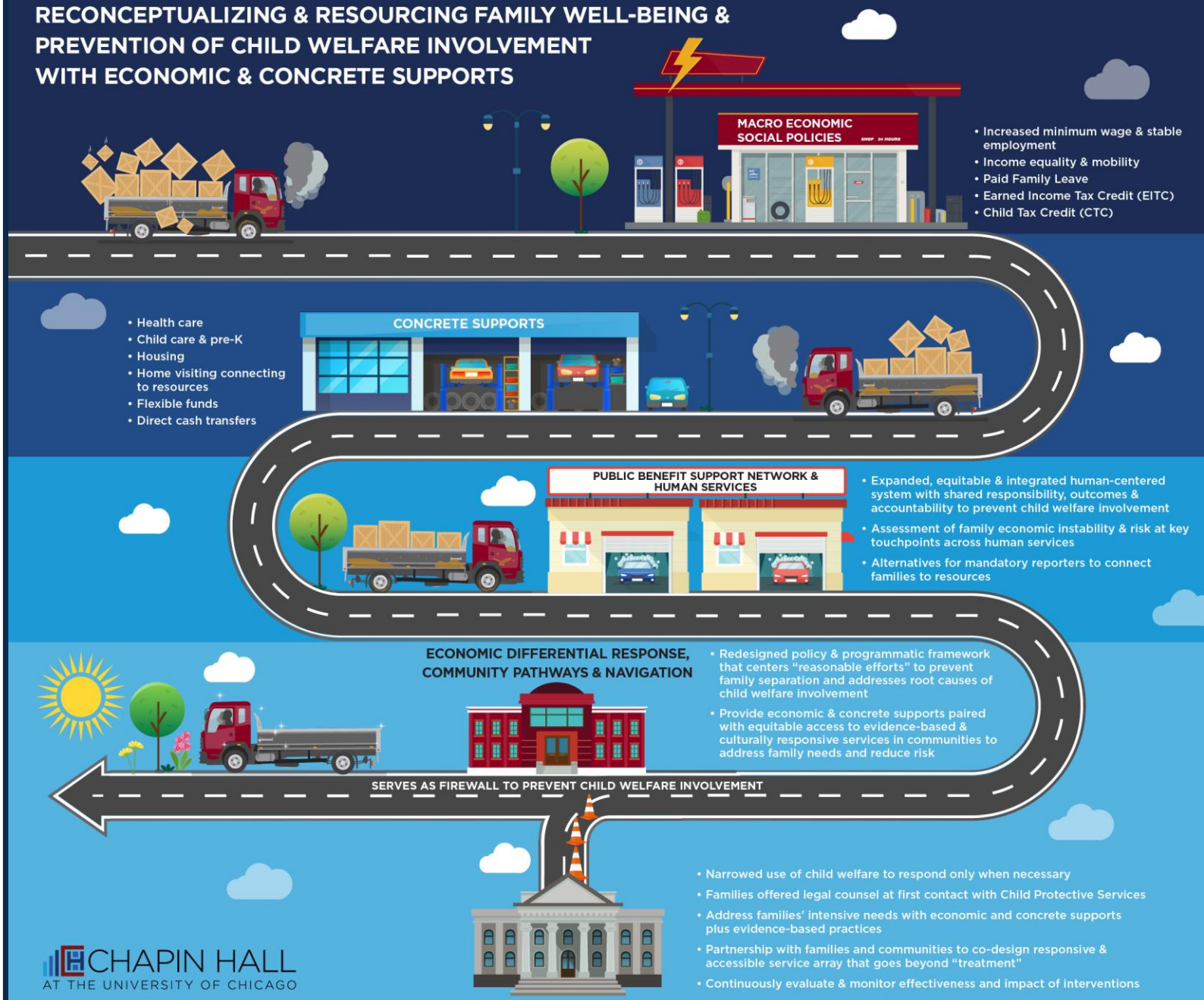


 **CHAPIN HALL**  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

# Resource

## Path to preventing child welfare involvement

### RECONCEPTUALIZING & RESOURCING FAMILY WELL-BEING & PREVENTION OF CHILD WELFARE INVOLVEMENT WITH ECONOMIC & CONCRETE SUPPORTS



CHAPIN HALL  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

(Evidence-based policy-making map adapted from Economic & Concrete Supports Reference List)

CHILD PROTECTION & FOSTER CARE

# Opportunities for Prevention

**States brainstormed actionable strategies towards building strategic partnerships with CW:**

- / Engage community partners to advocate on behalf of TANF or CW services.**
- / Target concrete supports for young children while aligning with statewide priorities.**
- / Identify flexible program funds that can provide concrete supports, like housing assistance.**

## Resources

- Chapin Hall: [Economic Stability and Family Well-Being](#)
- Family First Prevention Act, 2018; the plan amends every five years in each state (except Alabama)
- Modify Cost Allocation Plan for Title IV-E funding
- Review most recent [Child & Family Services Review](#) and applicable Program Improvement Plans (PIP), *if applicable*
- Explore [State TANF Data and Reports](#), current as of January 2024
- [State Fact Sheets](#) from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities



# Session 4: Implementing TANF and CW Partnerships

# Prevention in Action

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**Sarah Desmarais and Nancy Rostoni of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) discussed the process of developing a TANF and CW partnership called Family Impact Teams (FIT). FIT aims to reduce involvement in the CW system among families referred to child protective services.**

- / The purpose of FIT is to create an open door to safety net resources by embedding TANF staff, called Family Resource Specialists (FRSs), within CPS units. FRSs are existing MDHHS staff that previously served as TANF eligibility workers.**
- / The FRSs' knowledge of economic security benefits allows them to support families in applying for and retaining safety net program benefits, providing economic and concrete supports needed to stabilize families and keep children with their caregivers.**

# Strengths and Opportunities

Sample SOAR Analysis	
<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Client-centered.</li> <li>▪ Provides supportive services, day care, car repairs.</li> <li>▪ Partnerships with local community college.</li> <li>▪ There's transitions support. For example, clients can receive support as long as 6 months with an additional payment from the JOBS programs.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>CW services refer clients that have a CPS report and only recommend clients they can apply for TANF, but that is the extent of how CW supports clients with TANF. There are entry points to build partnership through education programming or quarterly meetings.</p>
<p><b>Aspirations</b></p> <p>Continue the line of communication with CW services to see what opportunities may emerge.</p>	<p><b>Results</b></p> <p>Conducting a meeting and learning from CW services was a good step. Families are served and strengthened when they stay together and have their needs met. Agencies can also be better perceived when clients receive what they need.</p>

**States completed a SOAR analysis to reflect on their vision and capacity to implement a TANF and CW partnership.**

# Session 5: Prioritizing Aspirational Prevention Services

# Prevention for TANF and CW

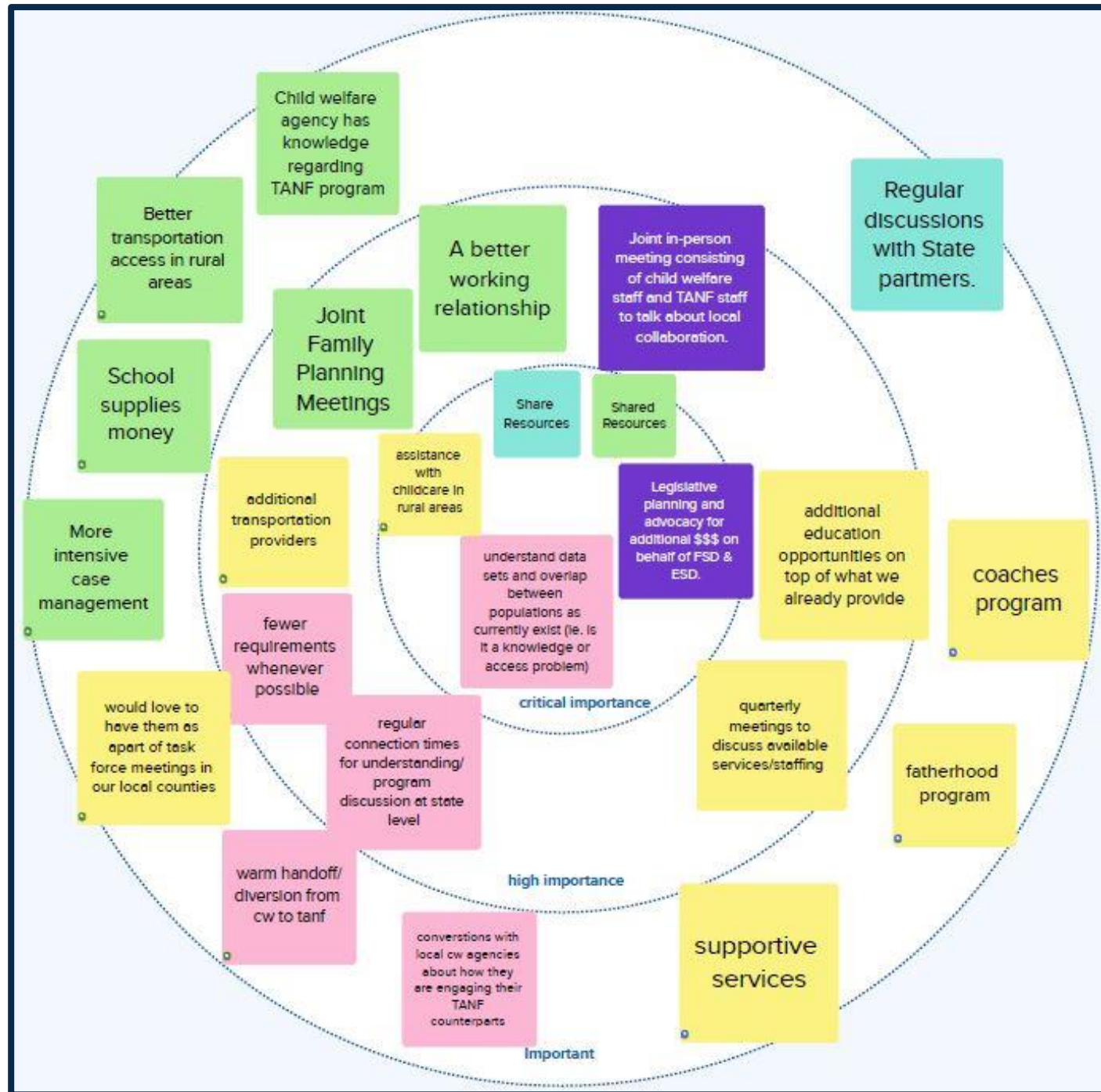
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States reflected on the previous sessions and shared:

- / **CW and TANF partnerships are a win-win for both programs and families.**
- / **TANF and CW services may operate and function as separate entities, however effective collaboration is possible.**
- / **Approaches to partnerships could be tested in other states.**
- / **There is a need for partnerships at the state level since there are varying levels of partnership at the local level. State-level partnerships could be more consistent and strategic than local-level partnerships.**

# Prioritizing Services

States prioritized aspirational services by using a bullseye visual to consider the degree of importance and to prioritize according to which is most actionable.



# Session 6: Next Steps Toward Prevention

# Focusing on the Feasible

States built on their previous work to form concrete goals, focusing on one next step that they can commit to beyond the collaborative.

The word cloud captures states' existing services that they aim to strengthen and leverage to facilitate their next steps, including:

- Train TANF frontline staff about CW services.
- Ensure all TANF-eligible families receive benefits.
- Increase available workforce development services in TANF.
- Train CW staff about TANF benefits and services.
- Increase community awareness of TANF benefits and services.
- Connect child-only cases to increased services.
- Examine TANF and CW data to better understand the overlap in families served and whether families screened out of CW services receive TANF or other assistance.





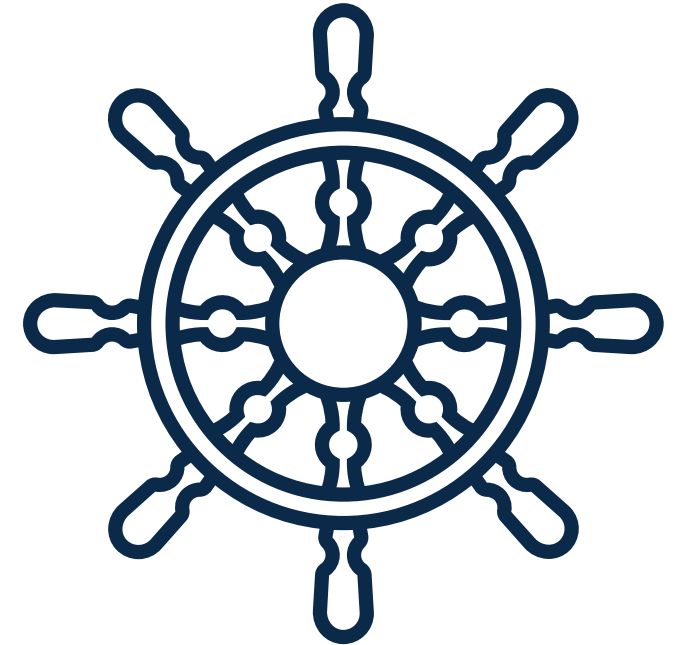


# **What We Learned from States**

# High Curiosity, Limited Access

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- / **Participating states had not yet established or were early in their partnerships with their respective CW agencies.**
- / **Some states were engaged in prevention efforts, though not formally aligned with their CW agencies.**
- / **It is more challenging for states with county-administered TANF programs to strategize TANF-CW partnerships.**
- / **Many states had a limited understanding of CW and how their services are or could be connected to TANF.**





## States were interested in...

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- / **Crafting evidence-based arguments to advocate for prevention with their legislatures and within their political contexts.**
- / **Bridging the gap with their CW agencies. The CW partnership is still a novel idea for many states, and it can feel challenging to operationalize.**



# For More Information

***This Learning Collaborative was part of OFA's STAR TTA contract, managed by BLH, Mathematica, and The Adjacent Possible.***

**For more information, contact [Steve McLaine](#) and [Janelle Jones](#).**

