



# Session 5: Connecting TANF Program Culture with Participant Experiences and Outcomes

*July 10th, 2024*





# OFA Regions V-VIII State Technical Assistance Meeting

July 9–11, 2024 • Westin Denver Downtown • Denver, CO

*Reimagining TANF Programs through the Lens of Program Participants*

## Positive Organizational Culture and Client-Centered Services: Lessons from Six TANF Programs



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**  
Office of Family Assistance



# Today's Presentation

Brief overview of organizational culture in TANF programs

What organizational culture looks like in your TANF program





# Project Overview

This work was funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation  
Conducted by MEF, in partnership with MDRC.

## Understanding Poverty

TANF Office  
Culture Study

Childhood and  
Family  
Experiences

*The views expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*





# Some Acknowledgements

This work was conducted by a team of researchers at MEF. This presentation is based on a final report authored by Riley Webster and Angela Gaffney who conducted fieldwork along with Mary Farrell and Asaph Glosser.

It would not have been possible without the participation of the six TANF programs included in the study, the staff at those agencies, and the participants who spoke with us about their experiences.

OPRE was also a fantastic partner in this effort, with particular appreciation for Lauren Deutsch Stanton, Amelia Popham, and Megan Reid.





# Focus of TANF Office Culture Study

- The **day-to-day influence** of various agencies' organizational cultures, including office design office procedures, on clients and staff
- Identifying exemplars of **productive, client-oriented organizational cultures**, as well as TANF agencies that have made conscious attempts at **organizational culture change**
- How agencies and offices **evaluate** the effects of these changes





# What is organizational culture?

Behavioral expectations or norms that guide individuals' actions within an organization and affect how individuals outside the organization interact with it

Put more succinctly, “the way we do things around here”

(Deal and Kennedy 1982)





# Think, Pair, Share



How would you define the organizational culture in your agency in 10 words or less?



How does this impact clients' experience in your agency?







# Why organizational culture?

States, counties, and territories **vary** in how they implement their TANF programs

The organizational culture of local TANF offices can affect **how TANF policies are implemented** and **how staff and clients experience** the program

TANF programs can **learn from peers** on how to support positive client and staff experiences





# What does a **positive organizational culture** in TANF offices look like?

An organizational culture that:

- Is client-centric at its core
- Has goals, processes, and spaces designed to affect positive staff and client experiences





# What did we learn from the literature?

..to change  
organizational  
culture



**Develop a guiding coalition**



**Communicate a clear vision**



**Closely monitor progress**



**Embed changes in organizational processes**





# What did we learn from the literature?



**Set clear and consistent program mission and goals**



**Encourage innovation**



**Prioritize staff development and empowerment**



**Create a client-centered focus**

**..to promote a positive organizational culture day-to-day**





# Think, Pair, Share



What are some the characteristics that make the **organizational culture** *positive* in your TANF office?





# Site Visits to Six TANF Programs



**Fairfax County Department of Family Services**



**Mesa County's Workforce Center**



**New York City's Human Resources Administration**



**Owens Valley Career Development Center's Tribal TANF Program**



**Santa Cruz County's Human Services Department**



**Utah Department of Workforce Services**





# What strategies did programs use to **change** their organizational culture?

1. Build buy-in and **enthusiasm** among staff for a change initiative
2. Invest in **training** to facilitate the change
3. Develop a **clear vision** that motivates staff
4. Enlist **external perspectives**
5. Use performance management systems and surveys to **monitor implementation**





# How did programs **promote** positive organizational culture **day-to-day**?

1. Involve **frontline staff** in process improvements
2. Use staff training to build skills and **reinforce agency goals**
3. Design **client-oriented spaces**
4. Increase **client choice** in employment services
5. Ensure **consistent understanding** of mission and goals
6. Build **progressive roles** for frontline staff and former clients
7. Simplify **processes**



*Contractor's Lobby in New York City*







# What challenges did programs face?



Ensuring **consistent implementation** across locations



Pressure on **staff workload** and time



**Client frustration** with changes to processes



Limits of **physical space**



**Evaluating** the change





# What did we learn from the six programs?

- Demonstrate **respect for clients** in goal setting, employment services, and in everyday administrative requirements
- Demonstrate **respect for staff** by investing in training, involving staff in innovation, and promoting internally
- Promote positive staff experiences **to improve** client experiences
- **Enhance client experiences** within constraints of program requirements
- Translate agency-wide initiatives into **actionable steps**
- The **role of leadership** staff in TANF office culture



*OVDCD Lobby Signage Displaying Culturally Tailored Prevention Programming Options to Clients*





# Key Project Findings



Scan the QR code to learn more about the study and to read a **literature review, final report, and project briefs.**





## OFA Regions V-VIII State Technical Assistance Meeting



# Questions?



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**  
Office of Family Assistance



# Reflection at tables



What challenges does your program face when trying to shift organizational culture?



How do you go about addressing those challenges? What strategies have worked best for you?

