Implementing Effective Strategies to Mitigate the Effects of the Economic Recession Roundtable
July 15, 2009
Albany, New York

Summary Report

Prepared for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Family Assistance

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Background and Understanding

As the nation continues to experience the effects of the economic downturn, Census figures illuminate harsh realities for the lowest income American families. Recent data indicate that the number of people living in poverty jumped over 2.5 percent in 2008 – before some of the worst effects of the economic decline were realized. Unemployment figures are up and while Supplemental Nutirition Assistance Programs (SNAP) are responding reasonably well, State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs are struggling to respond adequately to these trends (refer to footnote 1).

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) includes several provisions designed to aid individuals and families directly and also funds an Emergency Contingency Fund (ECF) that extends the reach of State TANF programs to additional families, supports emergency, non-recurring cash assistance, and augments subsidized or transitional employment opportunities. Generally, States have requested ECF allocations at approximately 60-70 percent for extending basic assistance, 15-20 percent for nonrecurring benefits, and the remainder to subsidized employment (see Appendix A).

As a strategy, subsidized employment involves subsidizing the wages of a participant with public funds (e.g. using TANF dollars to subsidize the wages earned by a TANF participant at their job placement). Typically, these placements also include additional services (e.g. job coaching, time management training, conflict resolution, and skill-building) to support long-term employment success after a subsidized opportunity ends (typically between six months and one year). Subsidized employment has been demonstrated to be particularly effective for harder-to-employ individuals.[1] Figure 1 provides examples of States that are currently operating subsidized employment programs.

Against this backdrop, the New York Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) requested technical assistance from the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network to help design and implement effective strategies to mitigate the effects of the recent economic downturn on low-income persons (especially Temporary Assistance for Necessary Families (TANF) participants and State Supplementary Payment (SSP) recipients). OTDA also requested additional assistance to effectively cope with the administrative and fiscal challenges resulting from the downturn by receiving additional technical assistance on effective strategies for managing the administrative challenges that result from increasing caseloads and fiscal constraints. Specifically, OTDA sought assistance in identifying strategies that other jurisdictions have taken in response to the TANF provisions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). These strategies included effectively using non-recurring short-term benefits; developing, funding, and scaling up transitional jobs or subsidized employment programs; and altering direct assistance benefits, while leveraging scarce resources.

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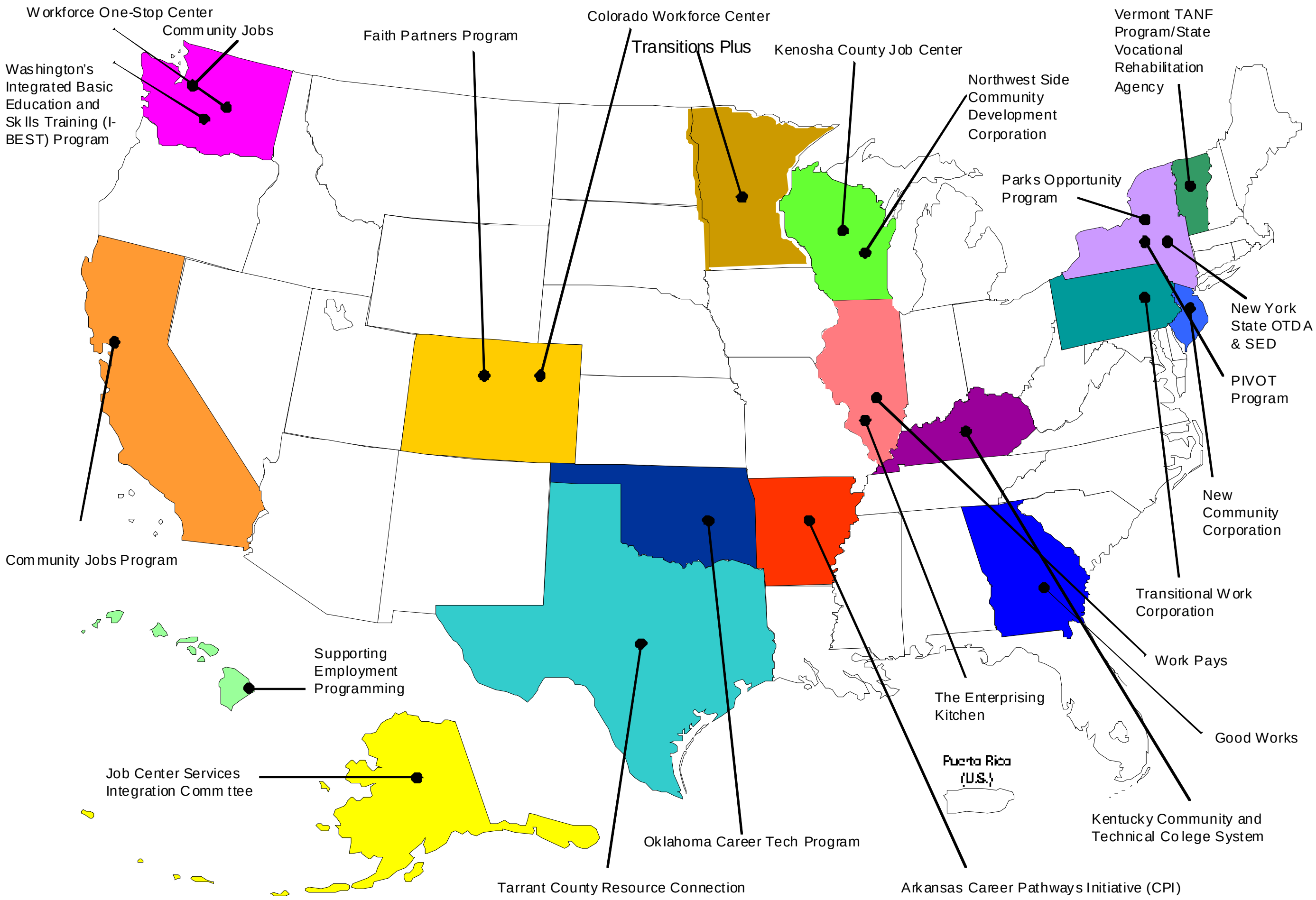
1 See Martinson, K and P. Holcomb (2007) *Innovative Employment Approaches and Programs for Low-income Families.* Urban Institute.

Figure 1: Sample subsidized employment programs



Subsidized Employment and Other Employment Supports

Roundtable Overview

In response to the request from New York, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance engaged its two contractors for the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network—The Dixon Group and ICF International—to address OTDA's technical assistance request. OTDA wanted to improve responses to the ARRA legislation, including the design and implementation of transitional and subsidized jobs programs and approaches to providing non-recurring short-term benefits to TANF-eligible families as a means to mitigate economic hardship.

The session was scheduled to coincide with the National Association of Welfare Research and Statistics (NAWRS) Conference in Albany, July 12-16, 2009. The Office of Family Assistance invited state TANF directors (or their designated representatives), state research and evaluation personnel, or persons directly responsible for administering related programs to participate at the Roundtable event.

Implementing Effective Strategies to Mitigate the Effects of the Economic Recession- Roundtable

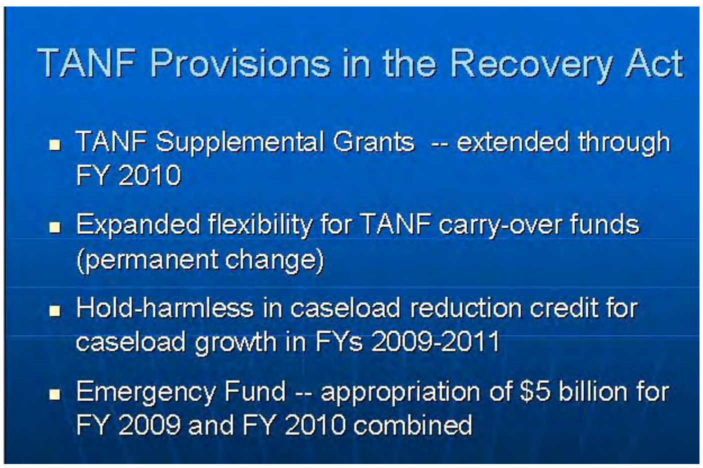
Overview

To answer OTDA's need, the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) determined that stakeholders would be best served by the convening of a peer-to-peer roundtable in order to engage in dialogue around the TANF-related components of ARRA and effective strategies for implementation. Drawing upon the strengths of promising state programs/activities, OFA brought together an interactive group of state and local TANF administrators and other stakeholders, including OFA and regional staff on July 15, 2009, for the *Implementing Effective Strategies to Mitigate the Effects of the Economic Recession Roundtable* (Roundtable) in Albany, New York.

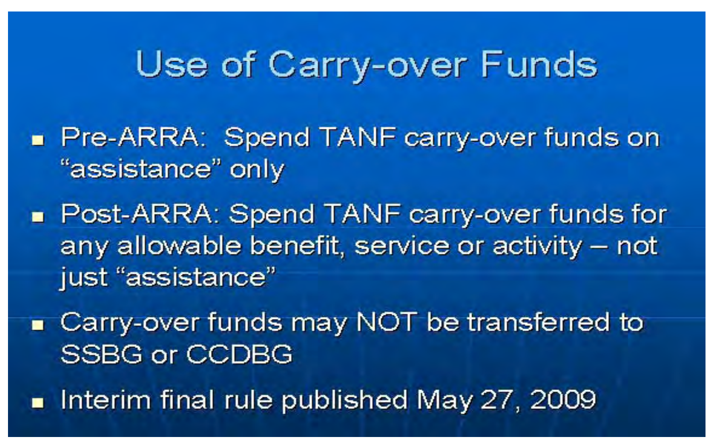
The Roundtable was broken into three sections (*See Appendix B- Agenda*) and attended by 32 individuals (*See Appendix C- Participant List)*. The first section was an overview of the ARRA components directly affecting TANF and how those components are meant to ameliorate the impacts of the recession on low-income families. Lead discussant Peter Germanis, Senior Policy Analyst, Office of Family Assistance, outlined the Contingency Fund and other components of ARRA that were targeted for TANF. Attendees asked questions about specific activities and provided additional recommendations for responding to the changes in the legislation and the additional resources that were made available to states.

The second section of the Roundtable was a peer-to-peer dialogue among state programs. Each state outlined specific activities that they have undertaken focusing on non-recurring benefits/diversion programs and how they will utilize ARRA to improve services to TANF families. The third section was a facilitated discussion around subsidized employment programs and transitional jobs activities by states. Stakeholders shared experiences and asked questions around subsidized employment and individually strategized around implementing targeted activities for TANF families.

Session: The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) and TANF: Implications for States and TANF Administrators



Peter Germanis outlined the TANF-related provisions in the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009. ARRA extends TANF Supplemental Grants through Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 and expands flexibility for TANF carry-over funds. Prior to the passage of ARRA, carryover funds could only be utilized on assistance, but ARRA allows states to use carryover funds for any purpose permissible under TANF regulations. In the past, unspent federal TANF funds could be reserved or carried over into a succeeding fiscal year, but those funds could be spent only on "assistance," defined as ongoing, basic needs, or supportive services provided to families who are not employed. ARRA makes a permanent change to allow jurisdictions to use prior-year TANF funds for any allowable benefit, service, or activity – NOT just "assistance." This provision is effective with the start of Fiscal Year 2009.



In order to determine the target work participation rate a state or territory must meet, each state or territory receives a credit for reducing the size of its caseload. ARRA gives states more leeway when it comes to rising caseloads. ARRA modifies the caseload reduction credit calculation. The caseload reduction credit is the percentage decline in caseload from 2005 and to the year prior to the current fiscal year (comparison year). For FYs 2009-2011, it allows a state to use the prior fiscal year as its comparison year or the credit it qualified for to receive when the comparison year was FY 2007 or FY 2008, whichever had the lower caseload.

In other words, if a state serves more TANF families in the normal comparison year than it did in FY 2007 or 2008, the target work participation rate is lower than it would have been had the normal comparison year been utilized.

ARRA established a $5 billion TANF Emergency Contingency Fund and eligible states—those that can show an increase in spending for TANF-related programs—can draw down additional TANF federal funds in 2009 and 2010, up to 50 percent of their base block grant over the 2-year period. The Emergency Fund will cover 80 percent of the increase in additional funding expenditures using 2007 or 2008 data as the base year in three distinct areas: (1) monthly cash grants; (2) short-term, non-recurrent benefits; and (3) subsidized employment. So, if the jurisdiction's basic assistance expenditures increased by $100,000 between the base-year quarter and the request quarter, then the jurisdiction would receive $80,000 in emergency funds for that quarter for that category. If the jurisdiction's TANF family assistance grant equals $100 million, then it could receive no more than $50 million from both the TANF Contingency Fund and the Emergency Fund combined during the two-year period. OFA developed an application form (left) to facilitate the submittal of necessary data, e.g., caseload data and expenditure data for the request-year quarter and the corresponding quarter of the Emergency Fund base year (FY 2007/FY2008). Jurisdictions may apply for funds up to one quarter before the start of a quarter on the basis of an estimate.

TANF Emergency Contingency Fund

A jurisdiction must meet one of the following three conditions for a quarter in FY 2009 or FY 2010:
1. The average monthly caseload for a quarter is higher than its average monthly caseload for the corresponding quarter in FY 2007 or FY 2008 (base year) and expenditures for basic assistance in the quarter are higher than expenditures for such assistance in the corresponding quarter of the base year.
2. Expenditures for non-recurrent, short-term benefits in the quarter are higher than expenditures for such benefits in the corresponding quarter of the base year.
3. Expenditures for subsidized employment in the quarter are higher than such expenditures in the corresponding quarter of the base year.

FORM OFA-100 – TANF EMERGENCY FUND REQUEST FORM

PART 1 – REQUEST-QUARTER DATA

Jurisdiction: Commonwealth of NAWRS **Date of Completion:** 5/15/2009

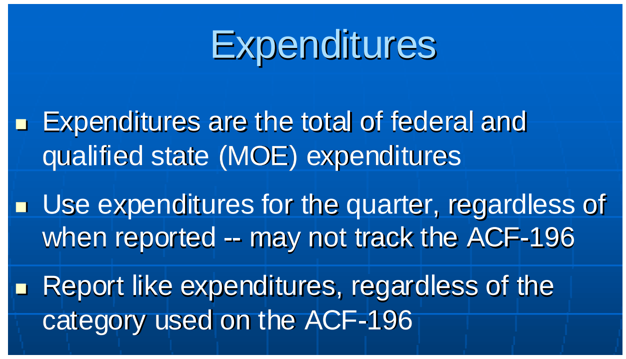
Request Year FY 2009

Which quarters have **revised** data?		☐ Q1	☐ Q2	☐ Q3	☐ Q4
Category		Quarter 1 (Oct 2008-Dec 2008)	Quarter 2 (Jan 2009-Mar 2009)	Quarter 3 (Apr 2009-Jun 2009)	Quarter 4 (Jul 2009-Sep 2009)
Assistance Caseload		2,000	2,200	2,400	
Expenditures	Basic Assistance	$3,000,000	$3,300,000	$3,600,000	
	Non-Recurrent Short-Term Benefits	$500,000	$600,000	$800,000	
	Subsidized Employment				

Request Year FY 2010

Which quarters have **revised** data?	☐ Q1	☐ Q2	☐ Q3	☐ Q4
Category	Quarter 1 (Oct 2009-Dec 2009)	Quarter 2 (Jan 2010-Mar 2010)	Quarter 3 (Apr 2010-Jun 2010)	Quarter 4 (Jul 2010-Sep 2010)
Assistance Caseload				

ARRA is explicit in its description of what expenditure is and states must meet specific criteria for expenditures to qualify. Expenditures are the total of federal and qualified state Maintenance of Effort (MOE) expenditures and states should use expenditures for the quarter, regardless of when reported. In other words, funds may not have been expended during the January-March quarter, but a state should report an expenditure that hits the books during that time, even if delayed. The intent is to reflect expenditures made for a quarter (as opposed to those reported in a quarter, e.g., as on form ACF-196). Expenditures may not be the same as the amounts reported on any given quarter's financial report. This is because TANF financial reports often reflect adjustments to prior data and because the timing of claims on those reports does not necessarily have to correspond to the period of expenditure. Under the current State TANF Financial Report (ACF-196) and respective reports for Territories and Tribes, a jurisdiction may have reported similar expenditures in several different categories. For example, a jurisdiction could report "emergency cash assistance" under a category called "Other" or under "Non-recurrent short-term benefits." When applying for emergency funds, a jurisdiction should submit expenditure data that is comparable for each quarter of the base year and for each quarter for which it is requesting emergency funds, regardless of the categories it used for those expenditures on its TANF Financial Report.



Session: ARRA and Non-Recurring Benefits

With the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), welfare in America was transformed from an entitlement to low-income families to a stabilizing support used to improve self-sufficiency. Since then, TANF eligible families have been permitted the opportunity to receive emergency, "lump-sum" assistance in-lieu of ongoing cash assistance payments. These payments have been for specific, short-term needs and are not counted towards an individual's 60-month lifetime limit. Many states and localities have found the use of non-recurring benefits to be an effective strategy for reducing ongoing dependence and are more appropriate for immediate needs, for example car repairs, security deposits, and other emergency expenses that families may encounter.

Questions:

- What is a non recurring benefit?
- What is the difference between TANF diversion and non recurring benefits?
- What types of activities are inherently permitted by ARRA under the non recurring benefit provision?
- Does a client receiving a non recurrent benefit lose time under the 5 year time limit?
- What are specific approved non recurring benefits and how we can apply for them?

Representatives from Maryland, New York, and South Carolina outlined a series of activities that they have employed to ensure that TANF-eligible families' needs are met and to reduce ongoing cash assistance need. They have found that non-recurring benefit activities—when successfully targeted—help individuals maintain or increase employment and earnings. Families have been able to avoid cash assistance thereby increasing cost savings to TANF programs. The three states discussed the potential use of non-recurring benefits to assist low-income families with back-to-school expenses such as clothing, books, and other supplies. These states also mentioned the use of non-recurring benefits to improve work participation by providing assistance in preparing for interviews, developing resumes, getting to interviews, and getting to work. For example, South Carolina is looking into using non-recurring benefits for a shoe-buying program that will provide children in TANF-eligible families with new shoes when school starts.

Mr. Germanis reiterated that TANF administrators have the option of providing non-recurring, short-term cash benefits that are designed to deal with specific TANF-related expenses, crises, or episodes of need. Non-recurring benefits *do not* count toward the Federal five-year time limit for receiving TANF because non-recurring, short-term cash benefits under TANF are not "assistance" according to the legal definition. As long as the assistance is not meant to be recurring or for ongoing needs, ARRA allows states to be creative in the way that they would implement an effective non-recurring benefits program for TANF-eligible families. If a state determines that there is a specific need for shoes for TANF-eligible families and determine that this is the best means for utilizing its funds, the state can work with OFA to determine if it can implement a program of this type. ARRA provides states with a flexible window for providing for individuals it deems in need. As long as an individual is TANF-eligible, the state has the authority to design a program and submit that program to OFA for final authorization. So, for example, if a state determines that transportation remains a major impediment for TANF participants, limited transportation assistance can be made available to TANF-eligible families to purchase gas vouchers and bus passes, repair family cars, and other job-search activities.

ARRA provides flexibility to states to further encourage participants to find employment and move toward self-sufficiency. This flexibility could mean additional child-care assistance and the ability of TANF-eligible parents to purchase work-related clothing and equipment.

Non-recurring benefits are an alternative to receiving ongoing TANF cash assistance and are a way for TANF-eligible families to receive short-term help without using up time on the TANF clock. So, it is assistance for individuals whose earned income has been reduced due to loss of a job, expired unemployment insurance (UI), or another reduction in earnings. The benefits are meant to be short-term assistance until self-sustaining income begins again, so if that means helping someone find employment, preparing kids for a new school year, or another emergency situation, states have the leeway to decide what is needed and how to apply the grant. As an example, some states are using the emergency funding to provide a one-time additional payment to TANF families by increasing the current back-to-school payment so that parents can better prepare their children for the upcoming year.

Session: Implementing Effective Subsidized Employment Programs for TANF Participants

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provided additional resources to states and localities to develop, implement, and maintain subsidized employment programs. Subsidized employment programs link TANF participants to public and private sector employment and helps individuals develop stronger self-sufficiency. Participants work in a position where they receive a paycheck, pay taxes, and qualify for the EITC. Public funds are used to reimburse an employer for all or part of the wages, benefits and employment-related tax and insurance payments for the participating TANF-participant. Successful programs incorporate a series of case management strategies including job/life skills training, housing and transportation assistance, child care referrals, health care access and financial literacy, and on a limited basis provide additional access to mental illness, substance abuse, and domestic violence treatment.

Four states—Missouri, New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington — each provided brief outlines of their subsidized employment programs. Each state provides targeted assistance to low-income families thereby improving possible outcomes. Green jobs are fast becoming a major employment sector and many states are investing in training programs that focus on training TANF participants in energy efficiency, weatherization, and other green professions that may fuel economic growth and promote improved self-sufficiency. New York and Pennsylvania each have developed and implemented—and received ARRA funding to improve—subsidized jobs programs for TANF-eligible families that specifically focus on "green jobs" and the "green economy." Many states have utilized ARRA funding to coordinate local partnerships to provide subsidized employment opportunities, as well as education and training, to TANF participants and low-income individuals who are unemployed. The following are outlines of promising and effective subsidized employment programs currently being utilized in various states. These programs have been identified by ACF Regions and other stakeholders that believe these programs can serve as models to other similar locations.

New York assists low-income residents by providing part-time community service assignments with nonprofit and governmental agencies. It provides a comprehensive educational and skills training program to assist TANF participants who lack high school/General Educational Development (GED) and have low reading and math levels, are teenage parents, or who have a poor or no work history. The New York programs include employment skills and job search training with the ultimate goal of placement into unsubsidized employment with one-year retention, support and up- grading. New York has implemented a series of initiatives targeting low-income residents, including the Green Jobs Corps, the Health Care Jobs Program, and the Transitional Jobs Program that works with local community-based organizations, the Parks Department, and other local stakeholders to improve the employment opportunities for low-income residents. Erie County, for example, has received nearly $350,000 to strengthen its Health Care Jobs Program which subsidizes health care positions for low-income residents of Erie County.

The Community Jobs Initiative has more than a decade of experience providing subsidized employment to low-income Washingtonians. Community Jobs links residents to more than a dozen community-based organizations and participants work a minimum of 20 hours per week. An additional 20 hours per week are devoted to individualized barrier management, which can include soft-skills training, mental health or substance abuse counseling, and basic-skills training. Community Jobs offers participants support services including transportation subsidies, work clothing, and childcare assistance and Community Jobs staff maintain ongoing and integrated relationships with participants and the work site. The Community Jobs program serves more than 2,000 participants per year. The Health Care Jobs Program is helping prepare participants for careers in job sectors that are expected to see continued growth in the future.

Missouri's ARCHS program provides a community-based pipeline of trained and job ready individuals to meet the needs of local businesses on a subsidized basis. ARCHS provides additional wrap around services and other supportive employment services to ensure that participants are successfully placed and are able to maintain employment. This "bottom-up" approach focuses on developing the job-readiness of potential employees, while simultaneously nurturing community relationships with local employers so that when participants are fully trained they are effectively placed in a position that is well-suited to their skills.

ARCHS provides a supportive continuum of care with employment/self-sufficiency services for the most vulnerable of local, low-income residents. A federally-recognized nonprofit, ARCHS works to create and maintain strategic community partnerships and promotes education as key component of its subsidized employment program. Ongoing development is key to ensuring that placed participants are able to meet the rigors of day-to-day employment. ARCHS leverages it Federal dollars with locally raised, private, and state funding to develop programs that are comprehensive enough to meet the needs of local residents. ARCHS creates a supportive employment environment by expanding childcare services, transportation, housing, substance abuse prevention, mental health, and other services. A major success of ARCHS is its partnership with the St. Louis based Christian Hospital. Dozens of individuals have been placed into fulltime work through this partnership and many were formerly subsidized employees who worked on a limited basis in healthcare and service industries.

Pennsylvania, through The Transitional Work Corporation (TWC)—a nonprofit organization in Philadelphia—provides TANF participants with job training and placement services to entry-level managers to fill local staffing needs. Through an integrated approach with local not-for profit and for-profit organizations, TWC provides employers with fully trained workers on a subsidized, temporary basis. TWC is America's largest urban transitional (subsidized) program and has an integrated model for private/public ventures that has been successful at placing thousands of low-income Philadelphians in subsidized work. Specifically, TWC works with local business to determine specific staffing needs and works with them to develop entry-level positions that are mutually beneficial. TWC provides all employees with the necessary employment supports to ensure success. These include additional training, life-skills development, transportation assistance, and childcare where needed. A new program that TWC has implemented incorporates the new green economy.

Facilitated Question & Answer Session- Understanding the Subsidized Employment and Non-Recurring Benefits Components of the ARRA

Question: If a State is determined to be eligible for additional funding under ARRA for subsidized employment, how much can the State expect to receive?

Eligible jurisdictions can receive 80 percent of the increase in subsidized employment expenditures. A jurisdiction may request funds under any or all of the three categories. Nevertheless. ARRA imposes a cumulative cap on the amount of funding that a jurisdiction can receive for the two-year period and localities cannot exceed 50 percent of the jurisdiction's annual Federal TANF family assistance grant.

Additional information available at:
http://www.hhs.gov/recovery/programs/tanf/tanf faq.html

ARRA funds can be used to offset 80 percent of a state's increased spending, subject to certain limitations.

Question: What has been the reaction of local unions to the development of subsidized employment programs and how have programs dealt with the unions?

In New York, unions have played a particularly significant role in the full employment attempts of low-income Americans. Notwithstanding, it is important to work with local unions to ensure that subsidized employment positions do not undercut the labor agreements that have been reached with certain employers. New York has worked hand and hand with labor unions to ensure their input and by-in. New York negotiates with unions to create additional job training programs for participants. As a result, once participants graduate from the subsidized employment program, they are eligible for full union benefits and participation.

Question: Does subsidized employment count as a work activity under DRA?

Subsidized employment is a countable work activity available to TANF cash benefit recipients. For these clients it is a countable work activity in which the participant's cash assistance is diverted to an employer as an incentive for the employer to hire and train the participant for a position that can lead to full-time unsubsidized employment.

Conclusion

Since the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, there has been substantial momentum among TANF administrators to utilize the new resources to improve self-sufficiency among TANF participants. The United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance has taken the lead in ensuring that State and local TANF administrators have the information necessary to improve access to subsidized employment and use of non-recurring benefits. OFA held the *Implementing Effective Strategies to Mitigate the Effects of the Economic Recession Roundtable* focused on the TANF components of ARRA, particularly subsidized employment and non-recurring benefits. The roundtable brought together ACF Regional representatives, OFA Staff, State TANF Administrators, and other TANF stakeholders to strategize methods for implementing effective programs for American families impacted by the current economic recession.

The TANF Emergency Fund provides resources for States seeking to develop or further implement subsidized employment programs, which are countable work activities. States are eligible to receive 80 percent of increase in spending on new or established subsidized employment programs. Moreover, the Emergency fund provides an 80 percent of the increase in spending for non-recurring, short-term benefits which have been shown to reduce on-going assistance among low-income Americans.

OFA is documenting specific issues and providing targeted assistance to help programs effectively utilize the emergency TANF-related resources available in ARRA. As a result of the Roundtable, OFA will continue to develop and provide targeted technical assistance for States, localities, and Tribes on the TANF Contingency Fund, new regulations, and other TANF-related policies that have been implemented as a result of the economic stimulus package. The narrative that proceeded speaks to clear pathways for implementing programs at the local level. The Roundtable served as a repository of information and introduced attendees to the available resources through the Welfare Peer TA Network.

There were expanded discussions around the subsidized employment programs and non-recurring [short-term/diversion] benefits for TANF-eligible, low-income Americans and changes to the TANF program. The Recovery Act established the Emergency Contingency Fund which provides up to $5 billion to help States, Territories, and Tribes in FY 2009 and FY 2010 that have an increase in assistance caseloads and basic assistance expenditures, or in expenditures related to non-recurrent short-term benefits or subsidized employment (refer to footnote 2).

2 http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opa/fact_sheets/tanf_factsheet.html

Appendix A: Roundtable Agenda

Agenda
July 15, 2009

10:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. **The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) and TANF: Implications for States and TANF Administrators**

David Camporeale
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Peter Germanis
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,
Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance

11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. **Roundtable Discussion: ARRA and Non-Recurring Benefits**

OFA will moderate an interactive dialogue among the states around non-recurring benefits and diversion programs and the successes that the states are experiencing in launching these efforts using ARRA contingency funds.

Moderator: Peter Germanis - Office of Family Assistance
Lead Discussants:

- Linda Martin – South Carolina
- Russell Sykes – New York State
- Vince Kilduff- Maryland

12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. **Lunch on Own**

2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.	**Roundtable Discussion: Implementing Effective Subsidized Employment Programs for TANF Participants**

OFA will moderate an interactive dialogue among the states around effective subsidized employment programs for TANF participants and how states are utilizing the ARRA contingency funds for subsidized employment activities.

Moderator: Peter Germanis - Office of Family Assistance
Lead Discussants:

- Eva Greenwalt – Washington State
- Amy Dvorak – Erie County, New York
- Barbara Guinn – New York State
- Kimberly Daniels- Pennsylvania
- Les Johnson- Missouri

3:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	**Facilitated Q&A Session- Understanding the Subsidized Employment and Non-Recurring Benefits Components of the ARRA**

Participants will have an opportunity to dialogue with lead discussants and other participants around subsidized employment and non-recurring benefits.

Moderators: Welfare Peer TA Staff

4:00 p.m.	**Wrap-up and Closing**

David Camporeale
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Dave Dlugolecki
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