



TANF & Child Welfare Partnering for Prevention: OREGON'S SITE JOURNEY

The Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance convened the Families Are Stronger Together Learning Community (FAST-LC) in partnership with the Children's Bureau to support eight States and two Tribes in forming partnerships between Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child welfare programs focused on preventing families' involvement in the child welfare system. The FAST-LC took place between September 2023 and September 2024.

Motivation for Change

Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) staff identified challenges associated with not having a consistent way to design, review, and understand the impact of preventative innovations across TANF and child welfare. They were concerned about their inability to gain sufficient insights into the impacts of strategies and supports for the implementation of innovations to the families and children they serve.

In response, the Oregon FAST-LC team wanted to design a consistent process and tool for reporting on the development, tracking, and data collection of program innovations to better understand their results, impacts, and unintended consequences. The process and tool were seen as integral to determining if and how well preventative innovations are contributing to two aligned agency visions: the Vision Into Action for Self-Sufficiency (TANF) and the Vision for Transformation for Child Welfare.

Partnership Innovations

The Oregon FAST-LC team included representatives from the Self-Sufficiency Program (SSP), child welfare program, and the Office of Reporting, Research, Analytics and Implementation. An External Advisory Working Group comprised of key external partners (including a parent mentor and tribal members from the Klamath and Siletz Tribes) was also formed. The advisory group worked alongside the agency FAST-LC team to co-design the process and tool to assess innovations.

The FAST-LC team and the External Advisory Working Group worked to develop the Innovation Assessment Framework, the process and tool designed to capture critical information from state agency and service partner staff regarding the development and implementation of agency innovations. Agency leadership was also kept apprised of team and advisory group progress related to the Framework.

About Oregon

The Oregon Department of Human Services is the principal agency for helping Oregonians achieve well-being and independence. It provides direct services to more than one million Oregonians each year.

Oregon's Self-Sufficiency Programs Division provides resources, like cash (TANF) and food assistance (SNAP), as well as targeted services to help people move out of poverty and toward whole well-being.

The mission of Oregon's Child Welfare Division is to ensure every child and family is empowered to live a safe, stable, and healthy life. The Division is part of a larger statewide social system that works to support children, families, and communities. The Division partners with Tribal nations to implement the Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act and honor the government-to-government relationship.

According to U.S. Census Bureau data, Oregon's estimated population in 2020 was 4,237,279, of which 12.1% lived below the poverty level.



Prevention Innovations

Throughout the process of building out the Framework, FAST-LC team members considered how economic and concrete supports are tied to family preservation and stability. They highlighted examples of potential prevention innovations and program experiments that have advanced this connection, such as the expansion of the clothing allowance program for families with young children.

The Framework is designed to collect and track information in the following areas:

- What issue is the innovation designed to solve?
- Who identified it as an issue?
- Who initiated the innovation?
- How will this innovation address the issue?
- What are the desired outcomes of the innovation?
- What metrics will be used to measure progress?
- How does the innovation focus on equity in terms of who might benefit or be harmed by it?

The Oregon FAST-LC team conducted an initial test of the Framework by identifying several sites and recruiting staff to “road test” it.

They also helped formulate a Framework Utilization Assessment to gather feedback from staff in the initial testing sites on the strengths and weaknesses of the Framework. The assessment sought to learn whether the Framework was too long or too complex and if completing it was an effective use of time. It also sought to determine if the Framework was asking the right questions, its relevance to innovation planning and operations, and its ability to analyze important aspects of the innovation.

The team will review the results from the “road tests” and the assessments to revise and refine the Framework and identify potential sites for testing the next version of the Framework. Oregon also needs to determine the composition and role of the External Advisory Working Group post-testing of the Framework and through its adoption by ODHS.

Lessons Learned

The Oregon FAST-LC team made noteworthy progress over the course of the year, principally in reaching consensus on the purpose and goals for the Framework and the creation of the process and tool, with questions geared toward collecting information on planning and implementing innovations.

The Oregon FAST-LC team recognized that progress in implementing change can be slow—and often that is a good thing! During the process of building the Framework, and in the initial “road test” of the tool, the team gained insights about the need for flexibility and adaptability to support the willingness and comfort of staff to use it. From the initial test sites, they learned how simple questions embedded in the Framework or prompted by the team can spark new creative thinking and set the stage for bigger change.

From an agency perspective, the Oregon FAST-LC team learned that the Framework can also help identify and understand innovation implementation factors and issues that may have been previously unknown or overlooked. They learned how the Framework can support agency vision attainment and its potential to help clarify and refine agency priorities. They also came to appreciate how the Framework can improve processes for sharing information across local, regional, and Tribal offices.