



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Office of Family Assistance



*Moving Forward: Weaving Stories
of Perseverance During COVID-19*



2021 Regions IV-VIII Tribal TANF and NEW Program Virtual Meeting: Moving Forward: Weaving Stories of Perseverance During COVID-19

Summary Report

March 16-18, 2021

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Overview

In March 2021, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA), held the Moving Forward: Weaving Stories of Perseverance During COVID-19 virtual meeting for Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Native Employment Works (NEW) programs in Regions IV, V, VI, VII, and VIII. This virtual event included sessions on promising practices for innovation from Tribal TANF and NEW programs, ideas for program adaptations, strategies for customer engagement, discussions on broadband access, and technology. Woven throughout the meeting (via video) were stories of positive impact from TANF and NEW customers.

Day One – Tuesday, March 16, 2021

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Susan Golonka, Acting Director, Office of Family Assistance

Presenters:

- **LaMonica Shelton**, TANF Program Manager, Region IV, Office of Family Assistance
- **Denise Edwards**, Tuscarora Nation, Branch Chief, Division of Tribal TANF Management, Office of Family Assistance

Prayer given by:

- **Mona “Koko” Lowe**, Muscogee Creek Nation

LaMonica Shelton of Region IV welcomed Tribal TANF and NEW programs and partners from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). She discussed the virtual nature of the meeting, the first for Regions IV, V, VI, VII, and VIII, and noted that the transition has been an adjustment for everyone. Ms. Shelton introduced Mona “Koko” Lowe of Muscogee Creek Nation who provided the meeting’s opening prayer.

Denise Edwards shared a land acknowledgement that honored the land on which she lives and works in Colorado and thanked the indigenous stewards of this land. She acknowledged the hard work and service of TANF and NEW program staff who work directly with families they serve. Ms. Edwards also introduced the Weaving the Stories video concept, a compilation of three customer success stories that was shared throughout the meeting. The first Weaving the Stories video featured the success story of a TANF customer of the Graton Rancheria tribe.

Re-envisioning Programs and Moving Forward: Reflections and Motivations Keynote

Presenter:

- **Jennifer Rackliff**, Cherokee Nation, Impact Strategist, Stratem Consulting

Jennifer Rackliff delivered the morning's keynote presentation, focused on reflections and motivations for re-envisioning programs and moving forward. She asked attendees to consider who, and what, inspires them daily. Taking moments to reflect on the inspiration that engages and motivates individuals is critical to grounding the work that they do. Participants were encouraged to consider how they can wake up inspired every day to pursue their goals and dreams while working with others to pursue theirs. She discussed the terms infinite and finite; while the finite mindset is focused on winning and identifying loss, the infinite mindset is focused on figuring out how one can perpetuate and advance the game. Activities such as sporting events fall under the finite mindset, which have clear rules and boundaries and always determine a winner and loser. However, individuals often find themselves in a space where there are no strict timeframes, fixed rules, or agreed upon objectives. The everyday world does not have clear winners and losers; people do not lose just because someone else gained. Instead, there are infinite possibilities. Most of the world is infinite including relationships, parenting, and business. The point of relationships is to maintain them.

Ms. Rackliff encouraged participants to embrace existential flexibility by facilitating a brief exercise. In it, she asked participants to write down their dreams, no matter how far-fetched they may seem. She explained that adults are never asked what they want to be when they grow up; society stops asking these questions once people turn into adults. Individuals settle into a finite mindset, which sometimes can lock them into a path without room for flexibility. To adopt an infinite mindset means remaining agile to respond to new experiences and continuing to reach towards one's dreams. Ms. Rackliff also stressed that it is okay to shift one's goals and desires overtime, as the act of moving forward will change each person's journey.

To close, Ms. Rackliff explained how the COVID-19 pandemic has provided society an opportunity to restart, to consider what needs to be changed. The pandemic has caused individuals to reconsider the ways in which they work and relate. There are infinite ideas and adaptations being made and change that is happening for the good. The pandemic has taken away a lot of boundaries and allowed people to explore what communities, families, and participants need and want. She asked participants to look not only at what is available right now, but to dream about what is possible—and needed—to change society for the better.

Fireside Chat: Access, Innovation, and Flexibility in Your Administrative Toolkit

Presenters:

- **Delia Smith**, Community Economic Support Director, Oneida Tribal TANF and NEW
- **Ashley Waupekenay**, Recruitment and Training Coordinator, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
- **Jamie Awonohopay**, TANF Case Manager, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
- **George Goggeye**, Human Services Director, Minnesota Chippewa

Moderator:

- **Louisa Jones**, Senior Director, Workforce Innovations and Poverty Solutions, ICF

Tribal TANF and NEW offices have had to rethink what the "office" means during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the benefits and challenges that come with virtual service provision and by having staff work from home. During this session, presenters shared how they are engaging clients in work activities and other virtual work, training, educational, and cultural activities.

To start, panelists briefly overviewed their individual programs' strategies, tools, and lessons learned in virtually engaging with clients effectively.

Delia Smith, *Community Economic Support Director, Oneida Tribal TANF and NEW*

During the pandemic, the Oneida Tribal TANF and NEW programs have used Facebook and other social media platforms to maintain contact with customers. Staff also created a self-help guide for participants, which lists hiring employers and essential points of contact.

George Goggeley of the Minnesota Chippewa nation shared that his tribe's TANF and NEW programs serve approximately 40,000 members. Most Minnesota Chippewa program participants receive economic supports from the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). Minnesota Chippewa TANF and NEW programs saw a significant decline (50 to 60 percent) in the number of customers engaging with employment services during the pandemic. Casino shutdowns and lack of technology access posed challenges for members. Because the Chippewa sits on remote lands, it has been difficult to create the infrastructure needed to support high-speed broadband. To help address immediate barriers related to technology access, the program has used mail to correspond with customers and allowed staff to use personal cell phones for work calls.

Ashley Waupekenay discussed the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin's Recruitment and Training division, which serves 100 youth workers annually through placement at work sites. During the pandemic in lieu of work-site placements, the program created a five-week program to support customers in strengthening skills needed to succeed in the workplace and financially. Customers participated in Facebook live training sessions to assist them in completing training packets on a range of topics, such as "building your brand," "looking into the future," "how far will your paycheck take you," and "what would you do if you knew you could not fail." Those who completed the program received a \$500 stipend.

Jamie Awonohopay, also of the Menominee Indian Tribe, shared that the tribe created training packets customers could pick up with their benefits checks during the pandemic. The packets guided customers in identifying goals, setting a journey, identifying support groups, planning for obstacles, and identifying sources of motivation. They included budgeting and goals sheets. The program also offered a drive-up option for exchanges instead of in-office meetings and has used Facebook Messenger, telephone calls, and texting to stay in touch with customers. Flyers were also distributed to parents that included fun and cultural activities they can do with their children during stay-at-home orders.

Moderated Discussion

Louisa Jones of ICF facilitated dialogue with panelists to provide additional insights into the promising practices that TANF and NEW offices can take when considering how customers can return to offices safely.

Question #1: What did your programs do to shift to remote work during the pandemic?

Programs increased office cleaning procedures, provided in-person drop off boxes for customers' documents, and used Facebook Messenger to communicate with customers. Staff used work cell phones to take calls from home routed via office mainline numbers to protect staff privacy. Programs also purchased computers for staff to take home.

Question #2: What challenges and solutions did you encounter when working with employers?

Presenters noted the importance of exploring employment barriers indigenous people face, including systemic racism, overt discrimination, and a lack of cultural understanding from non-tribal employers. To address these barriers, it is important to educate employers on the challenges indigenous peoples may face securing a job, completing an application, or participating in an interview.

Question #3: How have you adapted customer engagement strategies to account for varying levels of access and ability to use technology?

Some programs created drop boxes for participants to exchange documents with program staff. Others developed fillable PDFs for customers to complete forms, used Microsoft Teams for staff meetings, and gave customers a choice on how they would prefer to communicate with the program.

Exploring Flexibilities to Strengthen Programs

Presenters:

- **Denise Edwards**, Tuscarora Nation, Branch Chief, Division of Tribal TANF Management, Office of Family Assistance
- **Sandy Cloer**, Division Director, Tribal Child Support Services & TANF, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians
- **Katy Ciotti**, Director, Morongo Tribal TANF Program, Morongo Band of Mission Indians

Moderator:

- **Karen Beckerman**, TANF Program Manager, Regions V and VII, Office of Family Assistance

Denise Edwards opened the session by discussing federal efforts to promote flexibilities for TANF programs. She noted that in March 2020, ACF issued [TANF-ACF-PI-2020-01](#), which provides guidance to respond to questions from TANF programs about flexibilities in implementation. Later, in July 2020, ACF released [TANF-ACF-PI-2020-02](#), providing additional guidance on the use of Non-Recurrent Short-Term Benefit (NRSTs) within tribes. Ms. Edwards stated that tribes are encouraged to revisit these documents for detailed guidance and to reach out to their regional program offices for questions about program flexibilities.

In terms of the approval process for making changes to Tribal TANF programs, Ms. Edwards noted that staff should seek preliminary approval for program amendments from ACF by sending an email to their regional point of contact. ACF will provide preliminary approval in a reply email, if appropriate, and later provide retroactive approval. 477 tribes should contact their BIA Awarding Official Technical Representatives (AOTRs). Ms. Edwards noted that for both TANF and NEW programs, if the only change to work activities is delivery mode (i.e., transitioning from in-person delivery to virtual delivery), no program amendments are needed.

Many flexibilities are associated with using carryover balances for both TANF and NEW programs. Ms. Edwards recommended that programs work with their financial contacts within their tribes, as well as their BIA-AOTR contacts in the case of a 477 program. She noted that ACF wants all programs to feel supported in use of their carryover funds and suggested the [OFA Peer TA](#) website and [OPRE Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse](#) as additional resources regarding program finances.

The Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund (PEAF) provides \$1 billion in additional funding to TANF programs to provide non-recurrent short-term benefits (NRSTs) to TANF customers. As outlined in the [legislation](#), NRSTs may only be approved to deal with specific crises, such as emergency housing, homelessness, food aid, utility fees, burial assistance, clothing, and back to school payments. This funding may not be used for tax credits, child care, transportation assistance, or training. Programs may use up to 15 percent of the funds toward administrative costs, and programs must use the entirety of their initial allotment between April 1, 2021 and September 30, 2022. After that time, ACF will re-allot unused funds to other states, territories, and tribes. When brainstorming new ideas, Ms. Edwards cautioned that programs should consider their capacity to sustain new programs as pandemic relief assistance dwindles in the future. Ms. Edwards explained that while ACF has no authority to waive the work participation rate requirements, it does have authority to grant relief from resulting penalties should a TANF program

fail to meet requirements in the face of natural disasters and other calamities. ACF intends to exercise this authority to the maximum extent.

To provide practitioner perspectives, Sandy Cloer and Katy Ciotti discussed flexibilities within their TANF programs. Ms. Cloer of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians shared that the Tribal TANF program can enroll tribal members who live outside of tribal boundaries. They have also extended diversion services to participants with at least one child in the home (and some pregnant women). To qualify for diversion services, the applicant must be at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level and present proof of job layoff. The program set benefits to a four-month timeline at which point cases are reviewed again to confirm eligibility status. The program has not counted stimulus payments toward income limits nor required child immunization records. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' program made program amendments with approval from ACF within 30 days. The program also marketed available resources via its local newspaper and social media outlets.

Ms. Ciotti of the Morongo Tribal TANF Program discussed the importance of flexibility in providing relief because of seasonal fires. The program has tried to make eligibility requirements for NRSTs as flexible as possible within federal guidelines. Due to the pandemic, the program saw an uptick in transitional cases and began to provide extended case management services for up to 24 months. The program now offers transitional services to youth to allow them to participate in prevention and family formation services and job preparedness courses.

Moderated Discussion

Question 1: Ms. Ciotti spoke about conducting community assessments. What is the goal of each year's assessments?

Ms. Ciotti: The Morongo Tribal TANF program always sends customers an annual survey to see what services families are interested in, and gauge the needs and interests for cultural activities. During the pandemic, staff surveyed customers about the types of communication they prefer, and based on feedback changed all programs to be 100 percent online and have used Facebook and YouTube to communicate with customers.

Question 2: Is assistance available for grandparents caring for children?

Ms. Cloer: Yes, Eastern Bay serves both needy and non-needy grandparents with existing cases.

Question 3: How would you suggest setting up emergency services? If you could go back in time, how would you start?

Ms. Cloer: OFA regional representatives were instrumental in helping the program set up a foundation for emergency services. They let the tribe know what was possible and what was not.

Question 4: Is it possible to serve descendants through emergency services?

Ms. Ciotti and Ms. Cloer shared that descendants were already a part of their program caseloads prior to COVID-19. Both tribes primarily serve descendants because of income qualification guidelines. There is no limit to generation or lineage.

Question 5: Did you reach out to other tribes or organizations to figure out how to implement program plans?

Ms. Ciotti: Morongo Tribal TANF worked with its tribal coalition partners within our county. In California, all who apply to CalWORKS and identify as Native American receive information about tribal benefits.

Question 6: Did you encounter any surprises as you prepared and implemented emergency services?

Ms. Ciotti: Morongo did not see as big an uptick in need as we initially anticipated. Some families were furloughed but very few lost their jobs. Others had reduced wages and we assisted there. Much of our funding was not used because of difficulties adjusting policy.

Question 7: Would you like to share any final thoughts on what is important when considering program flexibilities?

Ms. Cloer strongly encouraged programs to adopt and implement emergency services with the help of their regional representatives. She recommended communicating with representatives about what other programs are doing to get ideas for how to best serve participants. Having a coalition of tribes to regularly meet with and trade strategies is helpful.

Day One Closing Remarks

- **Caprisca Randolph-Robinson**, Family Assistance Program Specialist, Region V, Office of Family Assistance
- Caprisca Randolph-Robinson thanked participants for attending and provided an overview of the next day's itinerary.

Day Two – Wednesday, March 17, 2021

Day Two Opening and Recap

Presenters:

- **Alisa Matthews**, TANF Program Specialist, Region VI, Office of Family Assistance

Alisa Matthews opened Day Two by reviewing Day One's content, including the endless possibilities of a flexible mindset and how TANF and NEW programs have created innovative ways to keep participants engaged, providing access to the resources and support they need. Some participants may be facing challenges beyond COVID-19. These challenges may require coaching and encouragement to embrace their own flexible mindset. She shared that the presenters for Day Two were selected to offer insight on effective coaching and strategies for engaging participants.

Plenary: Coaching and Motivating Participant Engagement in the Time of COVID-19

Presenters:

- **Samantha Hansen**, Senior Manager, Cook Inlet Tribal Council
- **Mark Pendergrass**, Human Services Program Manager, Muscogee Creek Tribal TANF Program
- **Scott Boyle**, TANF Director, Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria

Moderator:

- **Melissa Duis**, TANF Program Specialist, Region IV, Office of Family Assistance

Samantha Hansen began the session with an overview of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council's (CITC) Tribal TANF program. The employment training and services department is the largest department within CITC and offers a variety of services from adult education and youth services to vocational training and intensive case management. CITC's mission is to work in partnership with the people to develop opportunities that fulfill their endless potential. The program values interdependence, resilience, accountability, respectfulness, and humor.

CITC has three types of case managers:

- **Job Coaches** provide work-focused case management to work-ready participants.
- **Intensive Case Managers** provide coordination for housing, employment, and other vital intensive-need services.
- **Youth Services Staff** provide case management focused on education, training, and work readiness for youth aged 14-24.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought challenges to CITC, it has also allowed the tribe to develop new strategies for serving customers. For instance, customer eligibility processes were forced to change, as case managers were no longer able to meet with individuals in-person. Many customers did not have access to reliable technology, and many relied on these in-person meetings to communicate with staff and obtain services. CITC's office switched to providing these services over the phone.

Initially, the switch meant that many customers missed their meetings, experienced technology issues, and were excluded from services due to a lack of technological literacy or access. To remedy these challenges, the program expanded the ways in which customers could receive services and became more flexible when it came to scheduling and changes (see **Exhibit 1**).

Ms. Hansen also highlighted several services (see **Exhibit 2**) that CITC case managers provide to participants and explained how these services have adapted to continue providing services during the pandemic:

- **Peer-to-Peer Support:** The office utilizes a peer-to-peer support model based on relationship networking which was done virtually through online meeting platforms. Staff created and facilitated virtual content for customers, and peer-to-groups used Imago for life skills videos. The program provided internet as well as laptops/iPads to customers that needed it to complete their work. CITC is currently working through challenges for these peer-to-peer groups, including "Zoom fatigue," loss of nonverbal communication, disruptive home environments, and technological literacy.
- **Life Skills Classes:** The life skills team includes workshops around hard and soft skills. Workshop topics include communication techniques, transferrable skills, transitioning from rural to urban communities, budgeti goals, parenting, healthy relationships, workplace expectations, and job search strategies. Due to the pandemic, CITC moved all life skills classes to virtual meeting platforms. For cultural classes that required hands-on activities (such as

Exhibit 1 Example of CITC's Innovations due to COVID-19

Issue: CITC requires that each participant's Family Self-Sufficiency Plan (FSSP) must be signed. Not all participants have access to internet or phone to get this paperwork signed.

Solution: CITC expanded the ways by which individuals can sign their FSSPs, making this process accessible in several modalities, including:

1. Allowing verbal, e-mail, or electronic signatures;
2. Mailing FSSPs to participants and having them either mail them back or utilize an in-person drop box;
3. Allowing for electronic signatures from iPads, laptops, desks, and phones; and
4. Utilizing administrative staff for onsite printing and mailing needs.

Exhibit 2 CITC's Education Services

- Onsite Study Lab Access
- Individual Coaching Sessions
- Online Software Access
- Resources and Tools
- Flexible Learning Options
- Weekly Incentives and Testing Fees Assistance
- Transportation
- Onsite Child Care
- Focus on Curriculum Only
- Classroom Setting Only
- Hands-on Group Activities

beading), CITC created cultural boxes and mailed them to customers. CITC also provided several hybrid classes (with half of the participants on Zoom and half in person), adhering to social distancing requirements. CITC also created additional classes on technology use to assist participants with limited technological knowledge. Customers took digital assessments to determine who needed this assistance.

- **GED Classes:** GED classes are an integral component of CITC's services. However, the pandemic saw a decrease in referrals to and active students in these classes. The GED team started to focus heavily on social emotional learning and building relationships to encourage discussion amongst the classroom to allow for some level of connection. They used integrated case management to provide wraparound services and did one-on-one tutoring because there were so few participants. Case managers and staff used Calendly as a tool to schedule meetings.

To conclude, Ms. Hansen outlined five factors of customer success that have been impacted by COVID-19: spiritual wellness, relationships, healthy lifestyles, education and training, and financial stability.

Mark Pendergrass provided an overview of the Muscogee Creek Tribal TANF Program's career coaching model. Before the pandemic began, Muscogee Creek merged its case management and career specialist duties to ease the burden on staff and reduce the number of touchpoints for customers. The combination of duties was useful as the program addressed other issues brought to light during the pandemic. Reorganization involved creating a facilitation and training program for classes related to job readiness, job skills, financial literacy, and healthy relationships. These workshops and trainings helped customers strengthen soft skills.

The TANF office's career coaching model was forced to pivot when the pandemic hit. They did so by creating an online assessment, which was meant to help case managers know customers on a personal level even without meeting with them personally. The assessments asked questions to get to know each customer's personality, personal background, and career choice, so staff could support them in the best way possible. This allowed for case managers to provide coaching to customers virtually just as if they were in person. The biggest challenge has been assisting customers who struggle with technology. In these instances, the TANF office provides a lot of extra support and individualized assistance.

Mr. Pendergrass highlighted the opportunity that smaller TANF programs have when combining duties for existing staff. By doing so, programs can utilize the staff they already have, investing in these individuals rather than hiring outside staff. These staff are better positioned to assist customers along every step of their journey, rather than only meeting to focus only on one aspect of social service assistance. Customers also benefit as they do not have to meet with multiple people, but rather can form a strong relationship with one individual who understands their background and can be a champion for their continued progress. Hence, programs can use a coaching framework to support TANF and NEW customers.

Scott Boyle highlighted the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria's (FIGR) coaching model. The pathway to coaching started with a five-year Tribal TANF Child Welfare (TTCW) grant. It allowed program staff to learn how to engage in a different way and focus on trainings like trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing, systems of care, mindfulness, decolonization, and wraparound services.

Trauma-informed approaches have helped program staff understand the complete picture of the customer's life to provide protective services. The program staff also changed the language they were using to create more equal and inclusive relationships between staff and individuals coming in for services. For instance, they changed the term "case managers" to "family advocates" to make a clear distinction that families are not work, and to highlight that the program is there to encourage them on their own distinct paths to success. They also moved away from calling individuals "clients" and started using the term "participants." The program staff reevaluated how they celebrated success by working with the individual to define what success means to each person.

Additionally, FIGR adopted motivational interviewing practices used to create a collaborative approach to case management where staff use active listening skills to guide participants towards their own goals, empowering them to make positive changes defined by them. This is a collaborative strategy to decide how, when, and where advocates can best meet participants and support them. The program actively develops plans that are influenced by each participant's family and take the entire household into account when developing best interests for the participant. This process is also flexible, which allows it to grow as the family grows and changes. Mr. Boyle discussed FIGR's Mindfulness and Decolonization training, which allowed staff to stop thinking of themselves as people who have answers to all problems. Instead, it encouraged more active listening, focused on asking questions instead of immediately trying to provide solutions.

Finally, Mr. Boyle explained how the program has encountered multiple pandemic-related challenges. Staff have suffered from heightened compassion fatigue and secondary trauma. Their TANF office has worked to redefine self-care for their staff, because many typical outlets and routines—such as encouraging staff interaction, community bonding, and exercise—had to be altered. He also reflected on how difficult it has been to grieve without being together in person; a lack of personal connection has been challenging for both staff and customers.

Native Employment Works: Let's Talk Strategies

Moderators:

- **Kisha Russell**, TANF Program Manager, Regions VI and VIII, Office of Family Assistance
- **Marjorie Hudspeth**, TANF Program Specialist, Region VIII, Office of Family Assistance

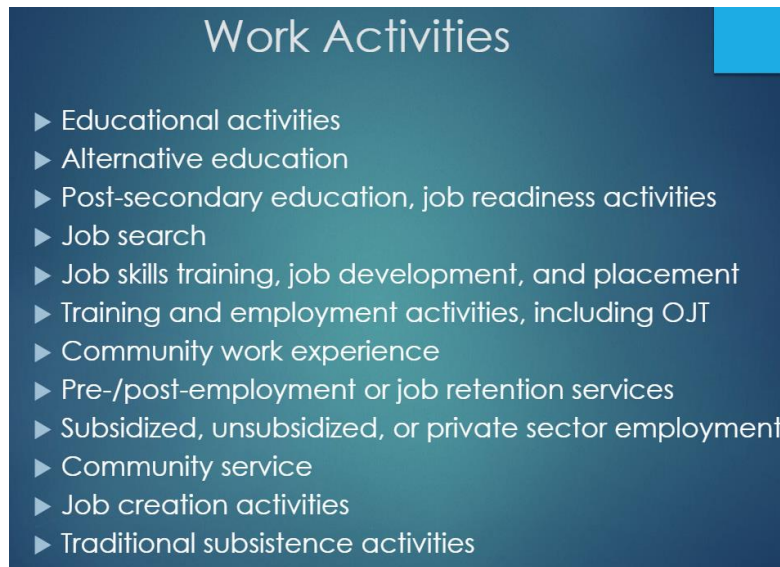
This session was designed specifically for NEW programs. Attendees heard from OFA regional staff to continue the conversation about program flexibilities, including work activity and supportive services flexibilities. Attendees also participated in breakout sessions to dialogue with their peers, reflect on practices that have been shared, and explore ways to strengthen their programs and re-envision service coordination.

The NEW program provides eligible Indian Tribes, including Alaska Native organizations, the opportunity to provide work activities and services to needy participants (45 CFR § 287.5). Tribes have flexibility to devise standards based on their own needs and can adapt to changes in community contexts such as the pandemic. For example, when defining eligibility, programs can:

- Focus on TANF participants (or not, as it is not a NEW requirement);
- Serve a specific group of individuals, such as unemployed adults, or single parents; and/or
- Prioritize participants or limit the number served (e.g., prioritize unemployed participants for certain services; choose to serve up to 40 individuals annually, etc.).

Work activities need to support education, training, or job readiness. Work activities in **Figure 1** are broad, allowing for adaptation based on changing circumstances. There is also flexibility in supportive and job retention services. Programs may offer supports in transportation, child care, and educational supplies if they help a participant prepare for employment. Programs should connect with regional offices if they have questions about these flexibilities or when a plan amendment is (or is not) required.

Figure 1: Ideas for NEW Work Activities



Participants joined breakout rooms to discuss challenges, strategies, and innovations in adapting programs during the pandemic. During report out, participants noted challenges relating to office shutdowns, layoffs, child care, and participants having limited cell phone minutes. As potential solutions, participants discussed allowing participants to apply for services through Facebook Messenger, providing monthly stipends, and creating an in-person drop box to exchange documents.

Day Two Closing Remarks

Presenter:

- **Kisha Russell**, TANF Program Manager, Regions VI and VIII, Office of Family Assistance

Ms. Russell thanked participants for joining and noted the important innovations and ideas discussed. She shared an overview of the agenda for the meeting's final day focused on addressing trauma and increasing technology access.

Day Three – Thursday, March 18, 2021

Day Three Opening and Recap

Presenter:

- **John Disque**, TANF Program Specialist, Region VI, Office of Family Assistance

John Disque opened the final day of the meeting by highlighting the stories of triumph and hope shared by program participants during the first two days. He noted that TANF and NEW programs have embraced the theme of the meeting—pursuing dreams and endless possibilities—with the endless adaptations and work they have done to continue to reach program participants. For example, programs shifted to virtual trainings, drive-up drop boxes, and online intake processes. Mr. Disque pointed out two lessons learned: (1) the need for emergency planning; and (2) the need for income screens that include funding from federal emergency relief sources. Mr. Disque discussed how TANF and NEW staff have also faced challenges with compassion fatigue and lack of connection to fellow staff and program customers and explained that the opening session would help TANF and NEW program staff address these issues and create strategic plans to address stress and secondary trauma.

Interrupting the Impact of Trauma

Presenters:

- **Nicole Bossard**, Ph.D., Consultant and Positivity Strategist, ICF
- **Barbara Pierce**, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Social Work at Indiana University; Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar Fellow

Moderator:

- **LaMonica Shelton**, TANF Program Manager, Region IV, Office of Family Assistance

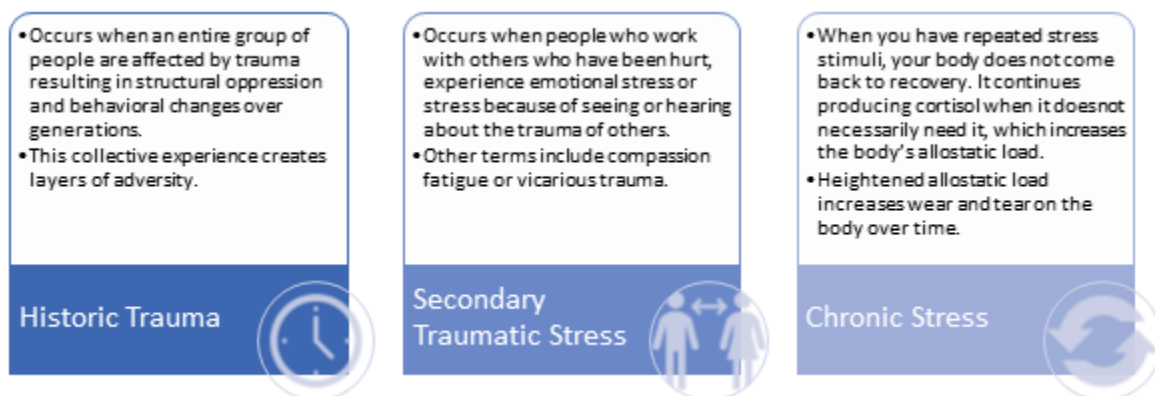
In this seminar, participants learned the differences between chronic work stress, Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), compassion fatigue, and burnout. Speakers introduced the concepts of emotional labor and secondary resilience in practice and how understanding how the brain functions after trauma occurs. The session aimed to offer participants strategies to intervene at each level of impact (including on individual, team, and organizational levels).

Dr. Nicole Bossard asked participants to reflect on what inspires, energizes, solves, or soothes a problem they see. She then divided participants into small breakout groups, directing them to respond to the following prompt: *“Why is it important for you, your team, your agency, and the community you serve to be a part of this conversation today?”* During group report outs, participants shared:

- They were energized by the resilience their participants demonstrate in the face of various forms of trauma.
- They felt inspired by new efforts to address long-standing gaps in access to broadband because of the pandemic, new ways of connecting those living on remote land, and new initiatives to connect school-age children with technology.
- It was important to take part in conversations about secondary traumatic stress because many participants are experiencing increased levels of stress and new challenges in daily life including family care, health care, and isolation.

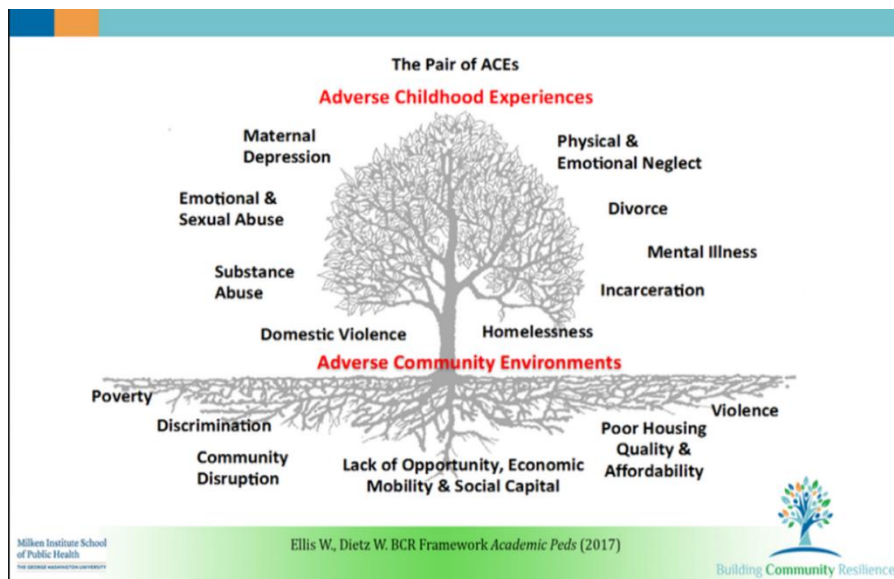
Dr. Barbara Pierce discussed the different types of stress. Not all stress is bad; in fact, some stress is useful. Positive stress produces the release of adrenalin during moments of crisis to help us react quickly or concentrate more acutely so we can take care of ourselves. However, stress associated with trauma and stress that is experienced chronically can hurt the body. This kind of trauma can be primary, secondary, or historic and may exhibit as insomnia, high blood pressure, and feeling depressed, among other things (see **Figure 2**).

Figure 2: Types of Trauma



For children, trauma may present through layers of adversity (see **Figure 3**). Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) may include experiences of abuse, neglect, or parental incarceration, among others, and have impacts on physical, cognitive, and emotional development. Adverse community environments may further increase the risk for child or family traumatic experiences.

Figure 3: Adverse Childhood Experiences and Community Environments

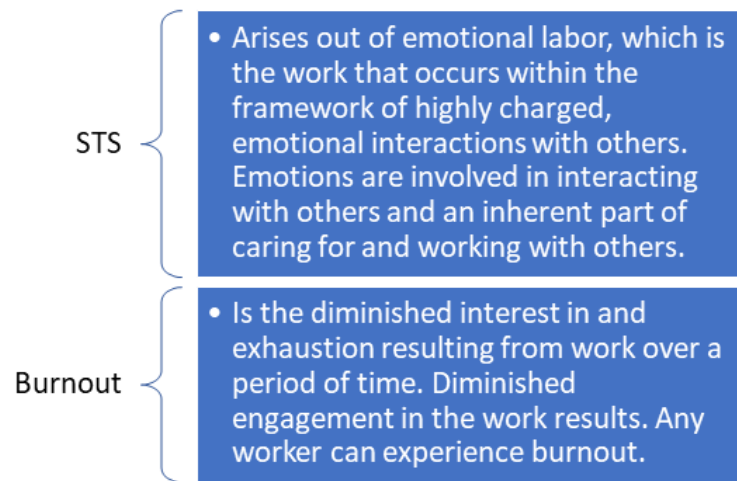


The impacts of trauma and heightened stress can have negative and serious impact on physical and mental health. The impacts of trauma and ACEs, however, can be mitigated by individual, family, and community protective factors. These protective factors may include a supportive parent, a caring peer or friend group, the ability to use therapy appropriately, and not having to cope with racism, sexism, poverty, or food insecurity.

Triggers are a manifestation of past trauma. Triggering occurs when the body perceives (even when not there) the danger associated with past trauma and engages the fight, flight, or freeze response. An individual may be triggered by external stimuli that involve something they hear, taste, smell, or touch. Someone triggered may exhibit as “checked out,” angry, or dissociative. If you or a TANF participant you are working with appears to be triggered, strategies to address it include breathing techniques, using humor to re-engage, offering manipulatives to support grounding, or engaging in mindfulness strategies.

Dr. Pierce defined and discussed how to identify symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS). STS is the emotional duress or stress that results from hearing about or seeing firsthand the trauma of others. STS is different from burnout as noted in **Figure 4**.

Figure 4: Differences between STS and Burnout



Signs of STS may include:

- In **individuals**: anxiety, fear and worry, isolation, sadness, changes in sleeping or eating patterns, illness flares, trouble focusing or intrusive thoughts, and relational conflicts.
- In **teams**: increased worker absenteeism and subsequent increased pressure on other team members, increased work conflicts as short tempers flare, withdrawal from colleagues, avoidance of stressful or traumatic tasks, stress, negativity and fear among colleagues, inability to hear or respond to supervision or support, and low morale.
- In **organizations**: constant changes in work relationships, diminished inter-team relationships, breaking workplace rules as a result of apathy, lack of vision for the future and flexibility, decreased work output, negative attitude toward participants, decreased progress toward outcome indicators, increased turnover, increased costs to the agency, increased mental health and other costs to participants, lack of respect for deadlines, negativity toward management, reluctance to change, and the belief that improvement is not possible.

Signs of emotional dysregulation because of STS may also include anger, increased heart rate, muscle tension, feeling overwhelmed or vulnerable, and becoming physically out of control or violent.

Individuals, teams, and organizations can address STS and burnout through resiliency strategies. Resilience is the dynamic ability to adapt successfully in the face of adversity, trauma, or significant threat. The most important elements (see **Figure 5**) of building resilience include self-reflection, self-awareness, optimism, and seeking and using support. These habits contribute to taking care of one's whole self—encompassing mind, body, and soul.

Figure 5: Essential Resilience Capabilities



Building resiliency during COVID-19 may present new challenges. Individuals must be more intentional about self-care than before. Individuals should acknowledge grief and loss and focus on what they can do for themselves safely now, whether it relates to food, fresh air, or mental or emotional strengths. Individuals should extend grace to themselves and others as they navigate what self-care may look like for them and seek to incorporate mindfulness and gratitude practices into their daily routines.

Individuals, supervisors, and organizations build resiliency in the following ways:

- **Individuals** can take interventions, including eating well, getting adequate sleep, taking walks, setting work-life boundaries, engaging in mindfulness training, taking vacations, meditating, and connecting with religious/spiritual beliefs.
- **Supervisors** can support resilience building by encouraging staff to take breaks and vacations, holding weekly check-ins, and engaging in reflective supervision.
- **Organizational leaders** do their part by providing social supports to staff, sending out weekly coping tips and self-care reminders, acknowledging difficult situations, and setting up a safe space for listening sessions among staff. Leaders set the climate and should be open to suggestions, proactive about addressing and preventing stress, and sensitive to staff needs.

To close the session, Dr. Bossard placed participants in small breakout rooms to discuss the following prompt: *“What could I do to build more resilience for myself, team, and program?”* During group report outs, participants shared they intend to:

- Take more self-care breaks
- Go on bike rides
- Spend time with pets
- Incorporate humor in their daily lives
- Spend time with family
- Pray
- Have lunch outside

Bridging the Digital Divide: Developing Internet Technology and Improving Access

Presenters:

- **Bill Travitz**, Technology Director, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians
- **Crystal Hottowe**, Grants Writer, Makah Tribe
- **Jonathan Crittenden**, TANF Program Manager, Cherokee Nation Career Services (Region VI)
- **Matthew Rantanen**, Director of Technology, Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association; Partnering and Business Development, Arcadian Infracom

Moderator:

- **Kathryn de Wit**, Manager, Broadband Research Initiative, Pew Charitable Trusts

Connecting tribal communities to dependable and low-cost or no-cost broadband, computer hardware, and WiFi access has never been more critical to delivering services to tribal communities. During this session, panelists shared how they built infrastructure, partnerships, and access pre- and during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also highlighted resources, partnerships, and tools that Tribal TANF and NEW programs can use in re-envisioning their programs.

Ms. De Wit shared that it is unknown how many American families do not have broadband connections—but it is estimated in the millions. The pandemic has exposed a significant digital divide and made clear how essential broadband is to day-to-day functioning and work. There are federal funding opportunities through the CARES Act and from the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration for tribal communities and those focused on minority-serving institutions' access to broadband.

Bill Travitz of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) shared that his tribe is in a mountainous region in North Carolina. EBCI suffered a ransomware attack in December 2019, shortly before the pandemic. As a result, EBCI re-did its network infrastructure, broadband deployment, and hardware. To increase broadband access, EBCI has added public access internet into community centers.

Crystal Hottowe discussed the Makah Tribe's experience. The tribe is located in a rural part of northwestern Washington state. Its location and the significant number of its families living in poverty have impacted the tribe's access to broadband. In 2014, the state superintendent's office mandated standardized school testing be conducted virtually. This prompted the tribe to begin to explore broadband access and funding issues.

Using recently secured licenses from Spectrum and the Federal Communications Commission, the Makah Tribe deployed wireless fiber backed connections. The tribe is also exploring a targeted cybersecurity academy leveraging its NEW and Adult Basic Education programs to support training for technicians, coordinators, participant service, analysts, coders, and IT specialists.

Jonathan Crittenden of Cherokee Nation Career Services shared that the Cherokee Nation is also located in a largely rural area in Oklahoma. A majority of the Cherokee Nation Career Services' participants did not have internet at the start of the pandemic, so the program gave technology grants to each family. The Cherokee Nation is also using CARES Act funding to increase technology access to families. It has a Technology Grant initiative for students to receive \$400 to purchase laptops so they can participate in school from home. The grant also created mobile hotspot access with one year of service. The Cherokee Nation further provided supports to higher education and vocational school students—also providing laptops as they transitioned to home schooling during the pandemic.

Matthew Rantanen introduced the [Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association](#), which consists of 24 federally recognized tribes. Regardless of tribe location (whether near or far from populated areas), once on tribal lands, broadband access is limited. There is a lack of fiber, access, and services to tribes to increase broadband and

technological access. To increase access, tribes can partner with external communications companies and coordinate with state partners to build funding collaboratives to conduct technology feasibility studies, create technology plans, and provide technology services to tribal communities. Broadband access should be funded through the TANF program as it has become a key facilitator for participants to meet program requirements.

Moderated Discussion

Question #1: What makes the digital divide on tribal lands different? What can programs do to address it?

Presenters responded that programs should prepare to conduct more than a feasibility study, but also an organizational assessment to glean what subsidies are available. Programs must also assess whether there is buy-in and if the tribe has the human capital to explore and implement a phased broadband plan. Programs should also explore relationships with the state and communications companies.

Question #2: How do you connect people to hardware and/or learning opportunities?

Presenters stressed the importance of community connections and accessing existing resources. Programs should connect with fellow TANF and NEW programs, as well as state and local nonprofits focused on technology access and training. They also suggested connecting TANF and NEW customers with [Lifeline](#), a federal program that lowers the monthly costs of phone and internet.

Meeting Closing and Prayer

Closing Remarks:

- **LaMonica Shelton**, TANF Program Manager, Region IV, Office of Family Assistance
- **Kisha Russell**, TANF Program Manager, Regions VI and VIII, Office of Family Assistance
- **Karen Beckerman**, TANF Program Manager, Regions V and VII, Office of Family Assistance

Closing Prayer:

- **Elaine Topsy**, TANF Director, Chippewa Cree Tribe

LaMonica Shelton, Kisha Russell, and Karen Beckerman thanked attendees for participating and expressed gratitude to the speakers. Ms. Beckerman reminded attendees of the Keynote presentation from Jennifer Rackliff and encouraged them to dream infinitely. She reiterated the great ideas shared on adapting to the pandemic, and strategies for engagement and coaching. Attendees were also given a chance to focus on themselves and the well-being of their staff and organization. During the pandemic, everyone has discovered how important technology is and the power of partnerships. The weaving of the video stories showed the amazing work that TANF and NEW staff do to help participants reach their dreams.