



TANF Technical Assistance Virtual Meetings: Navigating New Pathways Towards Building Thriving Communities



In February and March of 2021, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA), held a series of three virtual meetings with state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies and stakeholders. The series, *Navigating New Pathways towards Building Thriving Communities*, invited state TANF administrators and other staff to participate in cohorts by ACF Region (Regions I-IV, V-VIII, and IX-X). Each session focused on a specific topic related to supporting families through COVID-19 and beyond, and each took place three times (once for each cohort).

The ***Helping TANF Clients Achieve Long-Term Goals*** virtual meetings focused on strategies that foster lasting client success. Strategies were broken into three categories, including best practices for service provision, researching and sharing client success stories, and building effective partnerships. This tip sheet provides a synthesis of key takeaways from the meetings. It is intended for TANF program directors, supervisors, managers, and case workers.

TIP SHEET

Helping TANF Clients Achieve Long-Term Goals

Client success is much more than getting a job and transitioning from social service supports. Over the years, TANF and other social service programs have shifted toward customer-centered approaches that provide customers with basic resources they need to thrive (housing, food, transportation, childcare, and legal supports). This tip sheet highlights promising approaches from almost 15 programs on fostering social, emotional, and familial well-being and supporting a customer's ability to achieve economic stability through education and career advancement.

Tips for Building Customer-Centered TANF Programs

Customer-centered approaches to TANF programming can help customers feel empowered, valued, and more likely to thrive. Below are tips for creating customer-centered TANF programs.

- 1. Center customers in decision-making processes.** Customers are experts over their lives. Empower them to tell their stories, identify needs, and actively participate in building career plans.
- 2. Connect customers to basic resources.** Customers need their basic needs met to succeed at work. Programs can act as bridges to resources by providing wraparound services and referrals.
- 3. Foster and maintain long-term relationships with customers.** Clients often need support transitioning from TANF and navigating new employment opportunities. Consider offering ongoing support such as transportation, childcare, and case management to buffer the transition to a new job. Keep in contact with clients to ensure they maintain work and life stability.
- 4. Create career pipelines with employers offering high starting wages and opportunities for career advancement.** Since many entry-level jobs are low paying and offer little to no advancement, job placement alone is not a sustainable strategy toward long-term economic stability. Instead, partner with employers that offer training, higher wages, and advancement opportunities.
- 5. Embed life and professional skills development education in program offerings.** Offer training on critical life and professional skills, such as behavioral health, finance, and technology.



Tips for Collecting and Using Data to Support Customers

Using data to understand customer needs helps design relevant supports, measure how those supports work overtime, and continuously improve services. Tips for collecting customer data include:

1. **Get consent.** Let clients know your program uses data to improve program services.
2. **Build solid relationships from the start.** Customers are more likely to participate in surveys if they feel respected and are trusting of their support team from the beginning.
3. **Keep updated contact information.** Periodically check in with customers to ensure contact information is current. Be flexible in using different forms of communication based on preferences.
4. **Ensure confidentiality.** Check your local and state guidelines to ensure you are meeting confidentiality requirements before sharing customer success stories externally.

Tips for Sharing Customer Successes

Sharing customer success stories can motivate program participants, diminish stigma around those who receive social supports, and open the door for potential partnerships. Post stories on widely accessible social media platforms such as Facebook and feature them on program recruitment websites. Be mindful of confidentiality concerns and use pseudonyms when necessary.

Tips for Building Effective Partnerships

Partnerships can address customer needs in a holistic way by connecting customers with basic resources and support to help them thrive as individuals, within their families, and at work. Tips include:

1. **Set common goals.** Identify and agree to concrete and measurable goals. Setting goals supports group cohesion and staff buy-in.
2. **Get consistent support and buy-in.** Buy-in can be achieved through regular communication between partners, or by providing weekly or bi-weekly updates on tasks.
3. **Consider equity when pursuing partnerships.** When selecting partners, consider who is invited to the table, who you are listening to, and how ideas are generated. Be mindful of these questions in considering the communities you serve to avoid any undue harm to customers.
4. **See challenges as opportunities.** Often, the opportunity to partner presents itself through a challenge or resource TANF programs are unable to address or provide. Think strategically about how a partnership may help your organization solve a problem previously thought to be unsolvable.
5. **Share power.** Offer opportunities to share voices and authentically hear opinions and ideas from staff at all organizational levels and across partner organizations.
6. **Share data.** When feasible, sharing data can help interrelated organizations identify intersections and gaps and serve customers more seamlessly. Charting these areas can set the foundation for streamlining referral processes, amplifying services, and meeting customers where they are.

To learn more about these tips, programs, or the *Helping TANF Clients Achieve Long-Term Goals* virtual meetings, a full meeting summary report is available on the OFA Peer TA website at:

<https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/content/helping-tanf-clients-achieve-long-term-goals-virtual-meetings-february-and-march-2021>.

Special acknowledgement to: Joseph Jones, Center for Urban Families; Kathy Lambert, Connections to Success; Brandi Jahnke, Connections to Success; Mariana Chilton, Drexel University; Nycole Tylka, Utah Department of Workforce Services; Liz Carver, Utah Department of Workforce Services; Erin Oalican, Vermont Reach Up/TANF Program; Mary Beth Vogel-Ferguson, University of Utah; Megan Kauffmann, Colorado Department of Human Services; Katie Hogarty, Climb Wyoming; Monieca West, Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative; Jamie Woodson, Arkansas State University-MidSouth; Diana McCallum, Mathematica; David Croom, Ascend at the Aspen Institute; Babs Roberts, Washington State Department of Health and Social Services; Jessica Santos, Brandeis University; and Tikki Brown, Minnesota Department of Human Services, whose remarks formed the basis of this tip sheet.