



Helping TANF Clients Achieve Long-Term Goals

Summary Report

February 23, 2021 • March 10, 2021 • March 24, 2021

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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 how programs can incorporate strategies that foster lasting customer success. The virtual meetings included best practices from programs around the country, success stories of former TANF customers, and discussions about partnerships.

Central Office Welcoming Remarks

Stan Koutstaal, Division Director, Tribal TANF Management and Regional Operations, Office of Family Assistance (February 23, 2021)

Stan Koutstaal opened the series during the February 23, 2021 session by acknowledging the hard work and efforts of TANF program staff throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The new administration has several priorities that relate to TANF, including COVID-19 responses, racial equity and inclusion, and the economy. Each of these topics are addressed in the *Navigating New Pathways towards Building Thriving Communities* series. The pandemic has especially impacted TANF customers. The House Budget Committee reported an omnibus budget reconciliation bill that would, among other provisions, create a temporary \$1 billion TANF Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund.¹

Session Opening Remarks

Karen Beckerman, TANF Program Manager, Regions V and VII, Office of Family Assistance (February 23, 2021)

Eileen Friedman, TANF Program Manager, Region III, Office of Family Assistance (March 10, 2021)

Frank Shields, TANF Program Manager, Region X, Office of Family Assistance (March 24, 2021)

Regional Program Managers provided opening remarks at each of the cohort sessions. They thanked participants for attending and acknowledged the important work of TANF leaders and staff, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In their remarks, the regional leaders shared that this session aimed to help TANF staff offer families skills to move along a path to financial stability. The session focused on long-

¹ On March 11, 2021, the President signed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (H.R. 1319) into law, which included the TANF Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund.

term success strategies, presented findings from TANF leaver studies, and highlighted how to utilize and build partnerships to achieve long term success.

How We Built This! Helping TANF Clients Succeed Long Term

Joseph Jones, Founder and President and CEO, the Center for Urban Families (CFUF)

Kathy Lambert, Co-Founder, Connections to Success (February 23 and March 24, 2021)

Brandi Jahnke, Executive Vice President of Programs, Connections to Success (March 10, 2021)

Mariana Chilton, Ph.D., Director, Building Wealth and Health Network Program, Center for Hunger-Free Communities, Drexel University

Nycole Tylka, Assistant Director, Utah Department of Workforce Services (February 23 and March 10, 2021)

Liz Carver, Utah TANF State Administrator, Utah Department of Workforce Services (March 24, 2021)

Erin Oalican, Director, Vermont Reach Up/TANF Program

William (Ed) Trumbull, Vice President, ICF (moderator)

In this session, presenters shared how they built their programs to focus on long-term client success. Modeled after National Public Radio's "How I Built This with Guy Raz," presenters immersed in discussion about what it takes to achieve long-term success for TANF customers.

Joseph Jones of the Center for Urban Families (CFUF) opened the session with an overview of the organization, which provides workforce development supports to men and women ages 18 and above. CFUF's mission is to strengthen urban communities by helping fathers and families achieve stability and economic success. CFUF analyzed poverty data and conducted qualitative interviews of former customers who were financially stable. Through this research, CFUF found that those who were most successful had been with the program for at least three to five years. Much of their success could be traced to the continued support and guidance from CFUF staff. CFUF staff encouraged customers (referred to as "members" at CFUF) to keep pushing for better careers and opportunities. As a result, members felt connected to program resources. These findings led CFUF to create its "All In" programming and strategy.

"All In" creates social and economic opportunity while advocating for policies that promote equity and racial justice. It looks past the traditional ideas of economic self-sufficiency and ensures customers are in charge of their own journeys. "All In" focuses on workforce attachment, housing, childcare, transportation, financial capability, legal support, child support, behavioral health, education and training, and safety, along with intensive case management supports.

Kathy Lambert and Brandi Jahnke introduced Connections to Success (CTS), which focuses on individuals and families experiencing poverty, those who are unemployed, and underemployed. CTS has developed a holistic, data-driven economic mobility model that integrates services which enable individuals to build social capital and healthy relationships with an ultimate goal of preparing for job interviews and employment. Essential to CTS' long-term success is:

- **Culture:** CTS aims to create an inclusive community among staff and between staff and customers. Every morning staff begin the day with a gratitude exercise. Staff relationships with customers are meaningful and not simply transactional. CTS "never closes a file" and is always there to support customers well after they leave the program. CTS's supports are long-term, which is made clear to customers from the start.

- **The economic mobility model:** The program begins with a two-week personal and professional development class. The class helps customers think differently and see their own opportunities. The class covers fatherhood/motherhood, healthy relationships, skills development, and behavioral health. It focuses on how to get/keep a job, but also how to build a network and connections.
- **Partnerships within the community:** Working with social services, child support, the department of corrections, and other organizations helps CTS offer wraparound supports.

Mariana Chilton of Drexel University discussed the Building Wealth and Health Network's (Network) approach to customer success. In her food insecurity research, Dr. Chilton found that trauma affects individuals' abilities to achieve self-sufficiency. Even when individuals receive supportive services, many still experience financial hardships. The Network offers a healing-centered peer support program focused on wealth and health. The Network was built alongside individuals who had experienced deep food insecurity and trauma. Its goal is to shift power into the hands of people experiencing poverty to build their resilience. The Network focuses on financial and health goals—customers learn about finances, entrepreneurship, and choosing careers. It also focuses on building social networks and making connections. The Network's peer groups focus on networking and building community supports.

Nycole Tylka and Liz Carver of the Utah Department of Workforce Services shared that Utah has focused on assisting TANF families experiencing intergenerational poverty for several years. Its "Invest In You" program combines technology education, family strengthening classes, essential employment skills training, and executive functioning skills. Technical assistance is offered in collaboration with employers and an education provider focused on industry and field needs. "Invest In You" has run three programs across the state focused on three distinct employment sectors: medical device manufacturing, medical assisting, and nutraceuticals. Eighty-five percent of program participants have retained employment, earning approximately \$18 an hour after two years. The program's key elements address:

- **Employment skills training:** focused on working in a team setting, resume writing, and seeking advancement opportunities.
- **Executive functioning skills:** taught via presentations, modeling behavior, one-on-one coaching, and classroom expectations.
- **Holistic family supports:** Families meet once a week with staff to address things like household rules, meal planning and nutrition, and family budgeting. An onsite clinician is available during family activities and for individual help.
- **Cohort structure:** To build community and offer networking chances between customers.
- **Cash assistance:** When an individual's TANF case closes due to employment, they can continue to receive assistance for three months, including childcare, cash assistance, and case management. All customers exiting TANF are also eligible for extended case management services for up to 18 months.

Erin Oalican of Vermont's Reach Up (TANF) program shared the agency's mission, which is to join families in helping them overcome obstacles, explore opportunities, improve finances, and reach their goals. Reach Up partners with the MOMS Partnership, an evidence-based program developed by Yale University to address the mental health needs of mothers, particularly those who are over-burdened and under-resourced. The core elements of the program include:

- Use of a proprietary curriculum that applies cognitive behavioral therapy in a group cohort setting.

- A peer mental health ambassador embedded in each cohort who works alongside a clinician.
- Incentives for participation.
- Significant participant engagement.

Participating customers have reported that they experienced a dramatic decrease in depressive symptoms, an increase in workforce engagement and the number of hours worked, and an increase in follow through on treatment.

The Reach Up program received technical assistance from Yale University to implement the MOMS Partnership in its TANF program. It launched virtually in March 2020, which allowed increased participation across Vermont's rural areas. The virtual setting also allowed for flexibility in meeting times and schedules. Early indicators show that participating moms have experienced a decrease in depressive symptoms and anxiety. They have also reported increased social connections.

Facilitated Discussion:

Question #1: How has your program responded to COVID-19?

To adhere to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, one program partnered with a community college to access bigger classrooms to support in-person sessions for customers. Another moved its forms online and began to offer workshops virtually. Another program focused on helping customers access technology to participate in virtual programming and offered technical education to do so.

Question #2: What are some lessons learned for your program?

Presenters discussed helping customers to develop a sense of autonomy and to manage their social networks; taking customers to meet with and observe employers and to offer experiential and hands-on experiences; treating customers like humans and not just cases to be managed; spending time to get employer buy-in; and building a sense of comradery between customers and staff.

Question #3: What are the next steps to advance your program?

Presenters plan to apply lessons learned from hybrid or remote work models. They also discussed addressing equity and equality in anti-poverty and TANF programs.

Where Are They Now? Tales of Past TANF Clients

Mary Beth Vogel-Ferguson, Ph.D., Research Associate Professor, College of Social Work, University of Utah

Megan Kauffmann, Employment and Benefits Division Evaluator, Colorado Department of Human Services

Katie Hogarty, Director of External Relations, Climb Wyoming

Monieca West, Program Director, Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative and **Jamie Woodson**, CPI Program Director, Arkansas State University-MidSouth

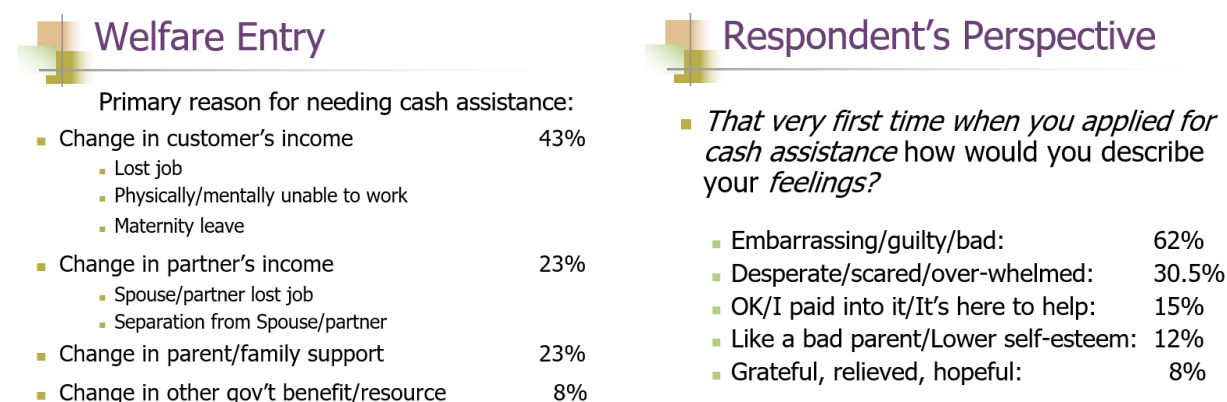
Shelley Osborn, Ph.D., Senior Manager, ICF (moderator)

In this session, presenters explored what happens to TANF customers after they leave the program. TANF leaver studies, return on investment studies, outcome tracking, and unemployment insurance data track individuals, but who are the families behind the studies? In this session, participants heard about what

helped former TANF customers be successful, if they encountered barriers, and if they returned to TANF or other social services.

Mary Beth Vogel-Ferguson of the University of Utah opened the session with an overview of a study on new cash assistance recipients required to participate in countable activities. The study followed these recipients over time, and data was collected through voluntary interviews to assess circumstances that led to needing assistance and changes after individuals received cash assistance. Individuals were also asked how it felt to seek cash assistance support (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Reasons for Welfare Entry and Respondent Perspectives in Requesting Assistance



Misconceptions about TANF customers impact their own views of seeking help, but also how services are offered to them. For example, only 11 percent of the population receives TANF cash assistance, but it is believed to be much more. Only a third of cash assistance recipients receive benefits for up to six months, but it is commonly believed that most receive benefits for long periods of time.

The study also included questions related to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study. High ACE scores correlated with other human capital challenges, such as physical health, mental health, lack of education, and learning disabilities. However, the study found that TANF customers with high ACE scores were engaged in work and work activities at the same rate as other TANF customers but were not achieving the same employment-level outcomes. When integrating ACE science into case management, it is important to not just focus on specific "scores," but to understand an individual's exposure to adversity and its possible impacts on work; TANF customers are not a homogeneous group.

When study participants were asked which parts of the program worked best for them, most responded relative to the supports their case workers provided as key to making positive differences:

- Worker traits/actions.
- Help meeting basic needs for family survival.
- Access to helpful services.

The study also asked participants if they feel they have become more self-sufficient since working with the TANF program. The majority responded in the affirmative, noting increased incomes, skills, education, or training.

Megan Kauffmann of the Colorado Department of Human Services (DHS) discussed Colorado's most recent TANF leavers study, which ran from 2016 to 2020. It was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of client successes and why they leave the program. A survey of former customers found that:

- 48 percent of one and two-parent families left because they got a job, or their wages increased.
- 28 percent of one and two-parent families said their income was higher after leaving Colorado Works than when they joined.
- 89.7 percent agreed or strongly agreed that services helped their children.

When asked how they got a job, most responded through a friend, family referral, or general connections. Individuals also found jobs from posting sources (such as Indeed). When asked about ways Colorado DHS met children's needs, individuals responded relating to financial assistance for food, clothing, rent, and school supplies. They also mentioned referrals to food and medical assistance programs.

Katie Hogarty introduced Climb Wyoming, a nonprofit that provides job training and job placement services for low-income, single moms. It uses a cohort model working with 10-12 moms per group, focused on social capital building and offering 10-12 weeks of job training followed by job placement supports. Staff reach out to customers every three months after training, offering support as they start their careers. The program has a 95 percent graduation rate, with 90 percent of graduates employed full-time at the end of the program.

Monieca West and Jamie Woodson of the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative discussed their work and shared qualitative insights from participant success stories. The Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative works to end low-income parents' dependence on government benefits. The program aims to:

- Increase enrollment in postsecondary programs.
- Increase completion of postsecondary credentials.
- Increase job attainment and retention.

Climb Wyoming Success Story

When Marissa applied to the program, she had no health insurance, was receiving supplemental nutrition assistance, was out of work, and her children were receiving public health insurance. After she completed the job training program, she took a mental health screening, showing dramatic improvements in mental health indicators. Marissa got a job as an office associate with a health sector employer. Two years after program completion, Marissa is salaried and has private health insurance for herself and her family.

Customers may be a custodial parent/caretaker of a child under the age of 21; a current or former TANF customer, or current recipient of food assistance, medical, or other government benefits; or be a family with a household income less than 250 percent of the federal poverty level. The program provides a variety of services:

- Educational expenses: tuition, books, fees, supplies/equipment, certifications, and licensure.
- Financial assistance: childcare, transportation, and technology.
- Support services: case management, coaching, employability training and certification, and career development services.

Customers shared that some of the most influential components of the program were the relationships they built, the financial assistance, the connections to helpful resources, and the personal attention they received from staff. **Figure 2** shares additional examples of customer successes.

Figure 2: Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative Customer Successes

FaSeeia

CPI Class of 2007 and 2016

Then: Teenage mom, taken few classes here and there

Now: LPN 2007 and RN 2016, RN for Department of Health and role model for her three daughters

Candice

CPI Class of 2012

Then: 19-year-old with infant and sole guardian of four siblings with an incarcerated mother

Now: BSN-Doctor of Nursing Practice, working in UAMS cardiovascular intensive care unit

Mikee

CPI Class of 2018

Then: Supporting daughter on a dead-end job

Now: Long-haul truckdriver earning upwards of \$2,000/week

Willie

CPI Class of 2017

Then: Trash man looking for a change

Now: Paramedic with fire department and urban hospital, children now thinking about college

Facilitated Discussion:

Question #1: What has surprised you about TANF leaver study data or findings?

One presenter noted how study participants frequently completed surveys on their smartphones. Another noted how TANF customers would not “settle” for the first jobs they got but sought more training to find growth opportunities.

Question #2: How do you keep track of participants after the program?

Presenters noted the importance of building relationships from the start and being clear about the program’s interest in collecting information both during and after the program. One presenter noted that it has a program graduate speak to current customers to explain what it is like to receive data requests from staff after program completion. The program also asks customers which data collection process they prefer; letting former customers choose the terms and means by which programs collect data is key to gathering it.

Question #3: How has COVID-19 impacted your ability to track participants?

Working virtually has broadened some programs’ reach to serve more customers. At the start of the pandemic, some programs received calls from customers to not only check-in, but also to offer support to fellow customers. Another program found some customers prefer and are more comfortable with virtual versus face-to-face meetings. It is exploring a hybrid approach to accommodate customer preferences going forward.

Questions #4: Are there ways that you shared or plan to share customer success stories?

Graduation ceremonies are a great way to invite community members and stakeholders to see and hear from the participants in person and speak about their experiences. One program’s recruitment website also has success stories for applicants to get a sense of what to expect from the program. Social media is another platform to share success stories, as are externally facing progress or annual reports.

Picture This: Partnerships through a New Lens Build

Diana McCallum, Senior Researcher, Mathematica

David Croom, Assistant Director for Postsecondary Achievement and Innovation, Ascend at the Aspen Institute

Babs Roberts, Director, Community Services Division, Economic Services Administration, Washington State Department of Health and Social Services

Jessica Santos, Scientist and Lecturer, Brandeis University Institute for Economic and Racial Equity

Tikki Brown, Director of Economic Opportunity and Nutrition Assistance, Minnesota Department of Human Services

Sara O’Keeffe, Graphic Artist, Center for Public Partnerships and Research, University of Kansas

Louisa Jones, Senior Director, Workforce Innovations and Social Policy, ICF (moderator)

In this session, presenters discussed how they developed and sustained partnerships with other organizations to further customer success. During this facilitated dialogue, a graphic recorder (artist) captured visual representations of what presenters shared on essential strategies, lessons learned, and overall outcomes. Drawings from each of the three cohort sessions can be seen in **Figures 3, 4, and 5** within the summary text below.

Diana McCallum of Mathematica Policy Research kicked off the session with an overview of the OPRE [Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse](#), which helps programs identify interventions that impact customers’ paths to economic self-sufficiency. Understanding these interventions and their impacts will help TANF programs more easily create strategies that ensure long-term client success. Users can search the Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse to see which organizations collaborated on each intervention using the “organizations implementing the intervention” tab.

Figure 3: Visual Representation of Partnership Success Strategies



David Croom of Ascend at the Aspen Institute shared that Ascend is a hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move children and their parents toward educational success and economic security. Ascend takes a two-generation approach to its work—focusing on children and their parents together—and brings a gender and racial equity lens to its analyses. A two-generation approach to lifting families out of poverty has six key elements:

- Post-secondary success.
- Early childhood education.
- Post-secondary education for adults.
- Economic assets.
- Health and well-being.
- Social capital.

Two-generation approaches are also dependent on partnerships and coordinated funding streams. Ascend's post-secondary and success initiative focuses on the millions of parents enrolled in two to four-year baccalaureate, vocational, or workforce pathways. Ascend's Policy Acceleration Partnership Grant Program guides cities, counties, and states to spur economic mobility and increase well-being by investing in the potential of student parents. As an example, a grant in the state of Georgia supports a collaboration between its Department of Early Care and Learning and the Technical College System of Georgia. The Georgia partnership helps student parents enrolled in the Technical College System receive childcare

assistance. Together, the early care program and technical college built new policies that made it easier for student parents to continue their education.

Figure 4: Visual Representation of Partnership Success Strategies



Babs Roberts of the Washington State Department of Health and Social Services discussed the state's goal of aiming to reduce poverty by 50 percent by 2025. Achieving this requires many partnerships across the state. Four keys to successful partnership include:

1. **Understanding:** Partners must know what they are getting into and why—establishing common ground on the goals of the collaboration.
2. **Buy-in:** Each partner must see how they contribute to the overall mission to increase buy-in and longer-term engagement.
3. **Benefit:** Each member must also see how their program can benefit from the partnership.
4. **Shared power:** There must be shared power across the members—so each can authentically hear and share opinions and ideas.

Tikki Brown of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) reflected on a state government agency's perspective on partnerships. Ms. Brown noted the following experiences:

1. **Ensure leadership support:** The Minnesota governor created work groups to assess pandemic impacts. The food security work group aims to ensure all Minnesotans have stable access to food

supplies during the pandemic and during recovery. The work group meets weekly to discuss where needs and challenges lie across all levels of state government. The lieutenant governor and governor receive weekly updates of work group proceedings.

2. **Increase intra-agency partnerships, too:** DHS also committed to better align its own programs—particularly between TANF and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). To increase coordination, the programs created a chart to identify core program differences, waivers, and their impacts. SNAP and TANF teams also host weekly meetings to share updates.
3. **Embed equity into partnership approaches:** Review who the program partners with and why—ask who is invited to the table, who does the program listen to, and how are ideas being generated?

Figure 5: Visual Representation of Partnership Success Strategies



Jessica Santos of Brandeis University discussed her team's work in career advancement and the value of partnerships in Brandeis's success. Research shows that many workforce development interventions do not yield economic [advancements in the healthcare sector](#), as, for example, moving from a certified nursing assistant to a registered nurse requires a lot of work and training. This challenge formed the basis for a partnership between Brandeis University and The WorkPlace, Inc., which is implementing an OFA Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG) through its Health Career Rx Academy. The partners developed a curriculum to change how career advancement was discussed with workforce development customers; for example, not just focusing on income and educational credential requirements, but also opportunities to

build careers over time. One key to the success of the partnership related to identifying shared goals and embedding co-learning in the curriculum development process. Issues of health as well as racial and workforce equity have also been exposed during the pandemic. Mutually beneficial and successful partnerships must assess these contexts when exploring shared workforce goals.

Facilitated Discussion:

Question #1: How do you keep partnerships fresh?

Presenters shared the importance of continuing to communicate about shared missions and why programs are collaborating. At each meeting, partners should intentionally restate why they are there and what they hope to gain.

Question #2: What initial steps should programs take to build partnerships?

Presenters shared the importance of assessing current and future sub-contractors and whether they reflect the populations they serve, tracking what resources programs use and how to identify needed partnerships, reviewing specific outcomes and services data to inform partnership outreach, and identifying a neutral and independent lead to support and guide partnership planning and engagements.

Closing Remarks

Kisha Russell, TANF Program Manager, Regions VI and VIII, Office of Family Assistance (February 23, 2021)

Shantel Mickens, TANF Program Manager, Region II, Office of Family Assistance (March 10, 2021)

Julie Fong, TANF Program Manager, Region IX, Office of Family Assistance (March 24, 2021)

Regional Program Managers provided closing remarks at each of the cohort sessions. They thanked participants for engaging and expressed gratitude for their work in support of families. During the final session, Ms. Fong further reflected on key messages the session shared, including those on dismantling and reassembling systems to ensure equity, elevating the importance of mental health needs and assistance, and stressing the importance of social capital and customer-driven strategies.