
A Study of TANF Work Participation and Engagement

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Policy Research

Study Context

- **Increasing federal interest in TANF recipients with zero hours in work participation activities**
- **Limited documentation on how the recession affected the services and resources available to engage TANF recipients**
- **State and local TANF agencies are interested in effective strategies for increasing engagement and employment outcomes**

Study Description

■ Research questions:

- What circumstances explain client participation—or nonparticipation—in work activities?
- What strategies have states and localities implemented to increase participation in federally defined and other work or work-related activities?

■ Data collection

- Site visits to 11 communities in 8 states
 - Sonoma County, CA; Hartford and Norwich, CT; Pinellas County, FL; Burlington, IA; Hennepin and Stearns counties, MN; New York City, NY; Dallas, TX; Wasatch Front North and South Regions, UT
- Telephone interviews with 30 state TANF administrators
- Document review (e.g., policy manuals, management reports, organizational materials, etc.)

Changing TANF Program Environment

- **TANF programs facing:**
 - Reduced budgets resulting in fewer staff and limited supports for recipients
 - Increased caseloads/workloads
 - Narrowed service options
- **More part-time employment now than in the past**
- **Some states revisiting TANF program design**
- **Changing TANF policies and caseload composition**

Reasons for Limited or No Engagement

- **Broadly defined exemptions with no program requirement**
- **Delays with accessing child care and/or transportation**
- **Waiting for activities to begin**
- **Limited service options and personal/work supports**
- **Part-time work with varying schedules and fluctuating hours**

Reasons for Limited or No Engagement (cont.)

- **Inability to quickly detect and address nonparticipation**
- **Unresponsive sanctioning policy and/or process**
- **Problems with reporting and verifying work participation**

Increasing Engagement and Program Outcomes

- **Administrative Strategies**
- **Policy/Procedural Strategies**
- **Work-focused Service Strategies**
- **Use of Data and Performance Management**

Administrative Strategies

- **Clear expectations for clients, staff, and providers**
- **Training on managing caseloads, reporting/verifying hours**
- **Use of specialized workers for participation reporting**
- **Structuring contracts to increase participation and job placement**
- **Use of participation incentives for clients**

Policy/Procedural Strategies

- **Mandatory timelines for staff to complete service delivery processes**
- **Quickly enforcing consequences for nonparticipation, with safeguards to ensure sanctions are implemented appropriately**
- **Formal initiatives for improving business processes**

Work-focused Service Strategies

- **Quick engagement through upfront work requirements (e.g., orientation, job search)**
- **Meaningful work activities that motivate and support clients**
- **Frequent, goal focused interactions between the client and case manager**
- **Federally funded employment initiatives (subsidized employment)**
- **Implementation of work-based, specialized programs for those with documented conditions**

Use of Data and Performance Management

- **Improvements in data processing and quality**
- **Management reports that raise awareness of client/ caseload status**
 - Caseload activity reports and formal case reviews
 - Developing performance management reports
- **Greater emphasis on employment than process measures to improve program outcomes**

For More Information

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