



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

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Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy Overview

Background and Overview

The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) invites nominations of state, territory, and local Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies to participate in the *Systems to Family Stability National Policy Academy* (the Academy). State, territory, and local TANF agencies may nominate themselves. Nominations are due by March 17, 2015.

The Academy will engage up to seven teams of key leaders, administrators and stakeholders from a select group of TANF jurisdictions to develop and implement TANF program improvements over an 18-month period. The Academy will support state and local TANF programs to improve employment outcomes and strengthen service delivery. The Academy is a response to demonstrated interest of states and counties to redesign and re-energize TANF programs to ensure that families receive needed services and supports for successful transition to employment and economic stability.

With the approach of the 20th anniversary of the enactment of TANF in 2016, the Academy offers a timely opportunity for nominated and accepted teams to reassess their TANF programs, and develop and implement innovative approaches that build upon new knowledge and opportunities. For example, access to job-driven training is important for individuals' success in the 21st century economy and there is widespread agreement on the critical components of such training. The inclusion of TANF as a required partner in local workforce system one-stops under the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) has the potential to enhance opportunities for TANF recipients to receive job-driven training. Additionally, new understanding about the role of executive functioning in employment success has spurred the design of promising approaches. Finally, promising two-generation approaches that focus on children's development and well-being while simultaneously providing employment-related services to parents are emerging. With the flexibility inherent in the TANF block grant, TANF agencies are well positioned to pilot, assess, refine and adopt such endeavors.

Participation in the Academy also comes at a critical time in TANF's history, as the national picture indicates the need for program improvement. While the child poverty rate remains high, TANF caseloads have continued to decrease. High rates of unemployment and economic instability continue to challenge low-income families. Although the unemployment rate for those with higher skills and in higher income quintiles hovers around three percent, the unemployment rate for the lowest-income families has remained stagnant at around 20 percent. Despite the need for increased engagement, TANF participation rates among eligible families have been low. Only 27 percent of families in poverty actually received TANF cash assistance in 2011. In addition, among those who receive assistance, many

struggle with barriers, such as physical or mental health issues, that exacerbate individuals' continued joblessness.

As evidenced by a growing number of TANF redesign efforts across the country, human service agencies are tackling these challenges by adopting new evidence-informed policies, processes, and practices. Comprehensive assessment, case management, job-driven training, and employment pathways are emerging as important components of successful TANF service delivery systems.

The Academy will help strengthen TANF systems to:

- Use innovative approaches to assess TANF participant needs and deliver more effective case management;
- Adopt job-driven training approaches, including career pathways, to provide participants with skills and resources to obtain and retain employment in promising occupations;
- Make improvements across the continuum of employment services from job search and job readiness to post-employment supports;
- Build programs that focus simultaneously on parental employment and child and family well-being;
- Improve TANF internal business processes and service delivery; and
- Incorporate practices informed by growing knowledge about executive functioning and trauma-informed care.

Benefits and Outcomes of Participation

Participating teams will benefit from a wide array of technical assistance activities over the 18-month academy period. The Academy will assist them in developing and implementing TANF redesign strategies to improve employment and economic stability outcomes for families and facilitate more effective and efficient use of resources. The Academy aims to increase agency capacity to achieve the outcomes identified above by:

- Increasing leadership and organizational capacities;
- Supporting effective partnerships between TANF agencies and community partners;
- Streamlining and modernizing service delivery structures;
- Expanding use of performance-based measures to assess progress and outcomes;
- Identifying and developing commitment to and leadership in family economic stability at the state and local levels; and
- Strengthening staff skills, capacity, and knowledge to deliver services to improve family economic stability and well-being.

Possible outcomes that participating agencies may achieve through the Academy include:

- Better use of available fiscal and human resources to achieve structural, system and service reforms—including improved staff training and coordination; improved management structures; and strengthened outcome measurement and reporting;

- Improved alignment of service delivery models with family needs—including seamless, ‘no wrong door’ approaches to whole-family service delivery;
- Creation of sustainable community partnerships and career pathways to increase employment/training supports to TANF families—including utilizing strong and stable employer engagements; efficient use of Labor Market Information (LMI) and demand data; and improved communication structures among human services, workforce development, and education and training providers; and
- Delivery of comprehensive services guided by timely screening, assessment and case management tailored to the needs of families.

Structure of the Academy

The Office of Family Assistance will conduct an 18-month academy to assist up to seven teams in developing and implementing strategies that align with the outcomes identified above.

The Academy process will provide teams with the opportunity to convene, gain exposure to knowledge and ideas, work collaboratively on major program challenges, and receive ongoing consultation and technical support, as they work to bring about change in their TANF program through the development and implementation of a strategic action plan.

Through intensive virtual and on-site technical assistance, OFA will support teams to develop or improve strategies. The Academy will provide:

- Exposure to emerging and relevant research on best practices.
- Experienced coaching teams to help guide teams through the process of developing and beginning to implement strategic action plans, including conducting a comprehensive initial program assessment and the creation of benchmarks and measurable outcomes.
- Exposure to experts in the field who can provide research and practice guidance through virtual and in-person presentations.
- Two in-person Academy meetings with participating teams, OFA staff, coaches, and national experts.
- Literature reviews and environmental scans on existing research and best practices.
- Peer-to-peer learning opportunities including possible site visits and site exchanges.
- Webinars and other virtual learning opportunities, including learning labs.
- Other written resources, products and how-to-guides.

A critical aspect of the Academy process is a strong and committed core team of at least three key leaders in TANF and relevant agencies who will attend the Academy meetings. Core teams are strongly encouraged to build a more comprehensive home team that includes leaders from relevant state and/or local partners, such as workforce development, adult education, economic development, child care/early education, transportation, and others as the agency deems appropriate to the focus of their work. Home team members will attend on-site planning meetings and are eligible to participate in most academy activities, including initial onsite consultations,

periodic onsite coaching meetings and conference calls, and virtual activities coordinated by the core team.

Expected Commitment

Selected teams will engage in a range of activities spanning 18 months. Nominated teams must be willing to participate in a series of onsite, virtual, and in-person activities. Core and home team members should be prepared to participate in an initial onsite coach-led consultation shortly after selection. Additional onsite consultations may include coach and expert faculty meetings. Virtual activities may include webinars, web-based trainings and conference calls. In-person meetings may include meetings, briefings, and other activities in Washington, DC. Additionally expectations include:

- Sending at least three agency leaders or key partners to participate in an in-person meeting in June 2015 and an in-person meeting in spring 2016. (OFA will cover the travel costs for up to three individuals from each site for each meeting, and sites are welcome to include up to three additional attendees at their expense for these meetings).
- Having at least one staff person participate in approximately six virtual trainings or events.
- Working closely with OFA and TA coaches to develop a statement of goals, assess gaps and develop action plans.
- Working closely with OFA and TA coaches to track site progress over the course of the academy.
- Participating in regular (quarterly) communication with OFA post-Academy on action plan progress and outcomes.

Nomination Process and Desired Qualifications

OFA will select **up to seven TANF agencies** for this technical assistance (TA) opportunity. OFA is interested in nominations of agencies that are interested in and have the capacity to address one or more of the substantive areas listed on page two, and have a demonstrated interest in improving TANF employment outcomes and service delivery. Self-nominations will be accepted.

Nominations should include a brief narrative of no more than five pages and a letter of commitment from the nominee. In selecting participants, OFA may consider such factors as organizational capacity, evidence of readiness and interest, and the desired outcomes of the nominee, as well as diversity in geography and administrative structure. After receipt of the nominations, OFA may contact nominees directly for additional information. Please provide the name of the person in the nominated agency who should be contacted, along with his or her title, organization, address, phone number, and email.

A webinar information session regarding the Academy will take place on Wednesday, March 4, 2015 from 2:00-3:00 p.m. ET. Please register at <http://tinyurl.com/policyacademy>. At that time, OFA will share additional details about the Academy, as well as answer any questions.

How to Submit Nominations

Send your nominations and any attachments to Damon Waters at damon.waters@acf.hhs.gov by 11:59 p.m. ET on March 17, 2015. If you have any questions or need more information about these instructions, please contact Lisa Washington-Thomas at (202) 401-5141 or lwashington-thomas@acf.hhs.gov or Mr. Waters at (202) 401-5295 or damon.waters@acf.hhs.gov.