

Elevating Family Input in TANF and Child Support Programs

10: Family Input Toolbox

This toolbox includes all of the tools, resources, guides, and more that are referenced throughout the previous sections. It also includes additional resources that many TANF cash assistance and child support program staff and administrators might find useful as you plan to engage families in program improvement.

The toolbox is organized into three sections:

- Program improvement and change
- Engaging families respectfully
- Collecting families' feedback

Each section provides the resource name, source, a brief description, list of topics the resource addresses, and in what section we reference the resource, if relevant.

How were these resources identified?

The TANF and Child Support Moving Forward: Further Incorporating Family Input study team identified the resources included here through the following activities:

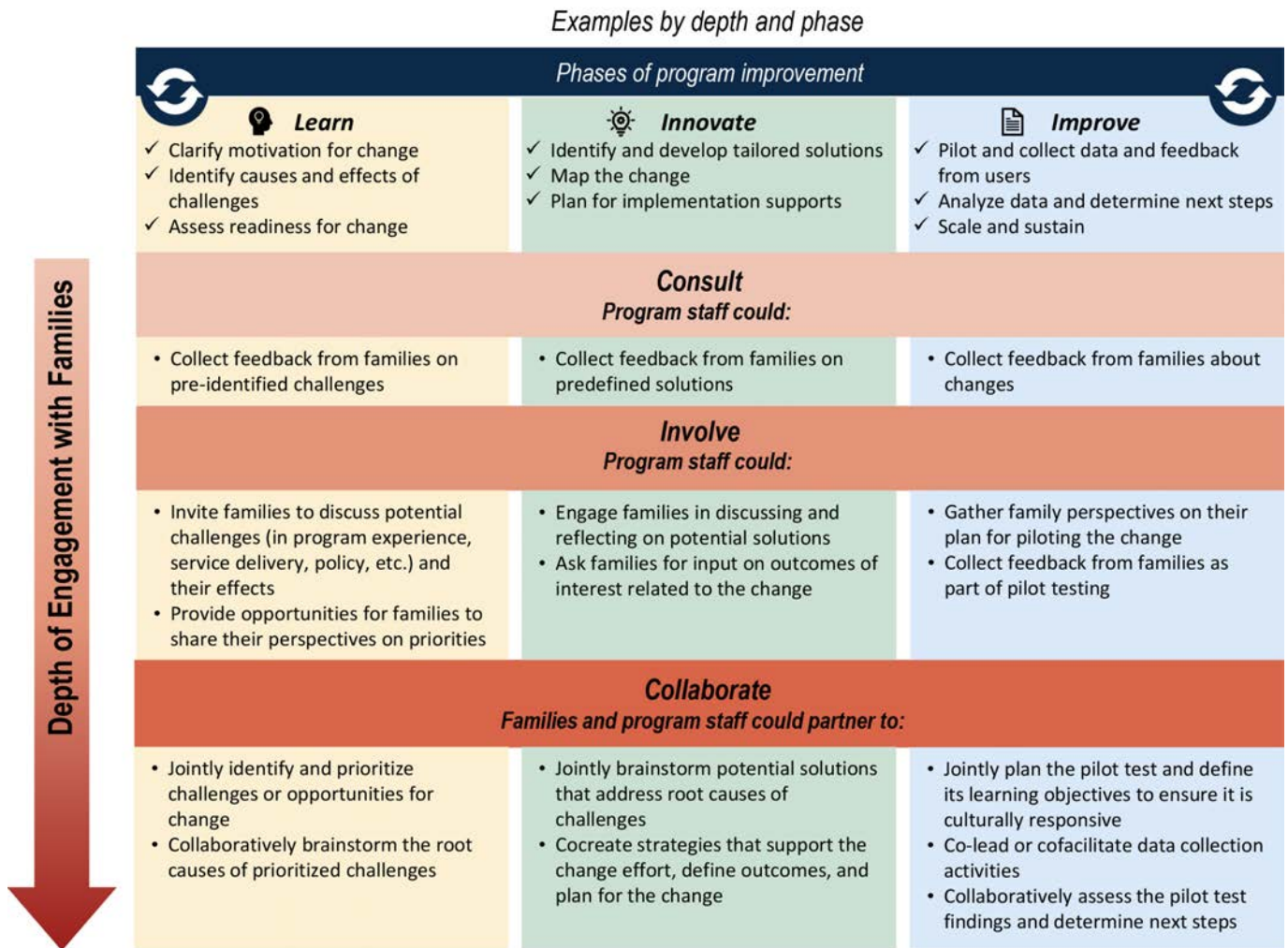
- A scan of academic and non-academic literature focused on family engagement and program improvement in TANF, child support, and human services programs. This included reviews of federal, state, and local human services agency websites and websites of TANF, child support, and human services professional associations.
- Consultations with federal Administration for Children and Families staff at the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Office of Family Assistance, and the Office of Child Support Enforcement.
- Recommendations from the study's Expert Workgroup.
- Interviews with four human services programs about how they have used family input to inform improvements to their programs. These programs and their family input initiatives include the Colorado Department of Human Services, Family Voice Council; the Baltimore City Health Department, Mayor's Office of Employment Development, Baltimore Health Corps; the Clark County, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program, Life in Transition Group; and the Quinault Indian Nation Tribal TANF Program.

Family Input Toolbox: Program Improvement and Change

Resource name and source	Resource description	Resource topics	Where referenced
Community Tool Box Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas	The Community Tool Box is a compendium of resources to support community-driven and community-engaged change initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for change • Engaging families in program improvement • Program improvement & continuous quality improvement • Pilot testing • Cultural competence 	Not referenced
Plan, Do, Study, Act Toolkit Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality	This toolkit explains a method to implement change through a continuous quality improvement process. Included in the toolkit are directions and examples to guide program staff and administrators through each step.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program improvement & continuous quality improvement • Pilot testing 	Section 2
The Breakthrough Series Institute for Healthcare Improvement	The Breakthrough Series is a model for collaborative learning to achieve improvement. This resource provides guidance to understanding and evaluating issues in a way that results in practical, innovative solutions that can be implemented in the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program improvement & continuous quality improvement • Pilot testing 	Section 2
Continuous Quality Improvement Tip Sheet U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Family and Youth Services Bureau	This tip sheet outlines the steps in a continuous quality improvement (CQI) process and provides tips for getting started with and implementing CQI.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program improvement & continuous quality improvement 	Not referenced
Process Mapping Tribal Evaluation Institute	This guide explains how to use a process map to understand how existing processes work or to identify how a new process should work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program improvement & continuous quality improvement 	Not referenced

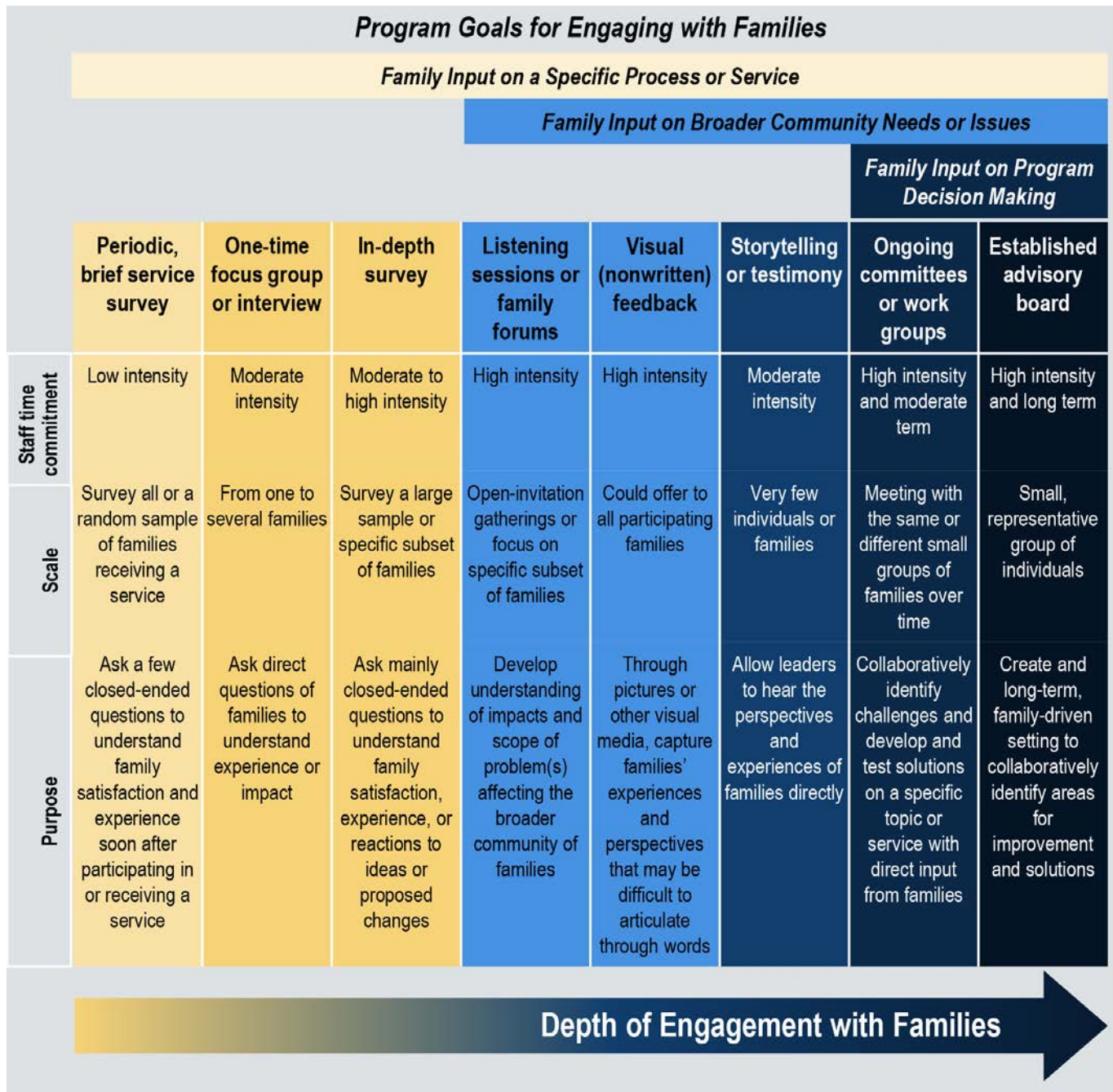
Resource name and source	Resource description	Resource topics	Where referenced
<p>Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI2): Enhancing Programs and Improving Lives The Learn Phase: Creating Sustainable Change in Human Services Programs The Innovate Phase: Co-Creating Evidence-Informed Solutions to Improve Human Services Programs Using a “Road Test” to Improve Human Services Programs (Practice Brief) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation</p>	<p>These resources provide an in-depth description of an evidence-informed approach to collaborative program improvement, specifically geared toward human services programs. In practice, these resources can help program administrators improve analytic methods to continuous quality improvement within the program infrastructure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program improvement & continuous quality improvement • Pilot testing 	<p>Section 2</p>
<p>Wandersman Center Readiness Thinking Tool The Wandersman Center</p>	<p>This is a toolkit to support programs in identifying aspects of implementation that help and hinder success. This is helpful for understanding the accuracy and utility of the program improvement efforts as they are being implemented.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for change 	<p>Section 6</p>
<p>How Can Organizations Assess Their Readiness to Co-Design? Casey Family Programs</p>	<p>This brief describes co-designing, an approach that amplifies the voices and experiences of the people closest to the needs addressed through an engagement or initiative. It includes considerations for preparing to co-design.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for change • Engaging families in program improvement • Program improvement & continuous quality improvement 	<p>Section 9</p>
<p>Racial Equity Impact Assessment Race Forward, the Center for Racial Justice Innovation</p>	<p>This guide introduces racial equity impact assessments and key questions to consider to anticipate, assess, and prevent potential adverse consequences of proposed actions on different racial groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for change 	<p>Not referenced</p>
<p>Equity Impact Assessment Introduction Seattle Children’s</p>	<p>This guide explains Equity Impact Assessment, a tool to systematically examine how groups that have been, and continue to be, disenfranchised and discriminated against will likely be affected by a proposed action or decision. It includes an Equity Impact Assessment Checklist and Tool.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for change 	<p>Not referenced</p>

Engaging Families in a Program Improvement Process



The program improvement framework used in this example is Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI²). See "[Learn, Innovate, Improve \(LI2\): Enhancing Programs and Improving Lives](#)" for more on LI².

Identifying the Right Family Engagement Approach for Your Program’s Goals



This is an original graphic, inspired by the [“Spectrum of Family & Community Engagement of Educational Equity”](#) from Facilitating Power and [Selecting Methods for Community Engagement](#) from The Policy Project, among others.

Family Input Toolbox: Engaging Families Respectfully

Resource name and source	Resource description	Resource topics	Where referenced
The Office of Child Support Enforcement’s Starter Kit on Engaging People with Lived Experience in Child Support Programs U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement	This toolkit is designed to support practitioners in engaging people with lived experience in child support programs. The toolkit outlines proper recruitment, compensation, and engagement standards for program administrators and staff seeking engagement from families in states and tribes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging families in program improvement Building trust with families Equity 	Section 5, Section 7
Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Through Coaching and Navigation: Insights from Convening Panelists Mathematica	This brief summarizes a panel discussion with TANF administrators and practitioners about how they advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion through culturally responsive coaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural competence Building trust with families Equity 	Section 5
Working Effectively with Families from Diverse Cultures Pacer Center, Champions for Children with Disabilities	This tip sheet, designed for practitioners, includes best practices for working with families from diverse cultures and backgrounds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural competence 	Section 5
Beyond Inclusion: Equity for Public Engagement Simon Fraser University’s Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue	This resource outlines principles for equitable family engagement and specific steps for integrating these principles into practitioners’ work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural competence Building trust with families Equity 	Section 7
The Tribal Best Practices for Family Engagement Toolkit National Indian Child Welfare Association	This toolkit includes a basic family engagement framework, concepts, and ideas for engaging families at all levels within Systems of Care. It discusses addressing historical and intergenerational trauma; culturally-based trainings and curriculum for program staff; engagement strategies; and suggestions for how families can make an impact at the policy, management, and service delivery levels within Systems of Care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural competence Building trust with families Equity 	Section 5
Person Centered Language Practice Tool University of Minnesota, Center for Practice Transformation	This resource provides a guide for the use of language that centers families and recognizes their dignity and strengths. The use of appropriate language for outreach and communication is a key step as you plan to gather input from families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building trust with families Cultural competence 	Section 7

Resource name and source	Resource description	Resource topics	Where referenced
<p>Methods and Emerging Strategies to Engage People with Lived Experience U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation</p>	<p>This brief shares the lessons learned from initiatives that engaged individuals with lived experience in an effort to inform research, policy, and practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging families in program improvement Building trust with families Equity 	<p>Section 7</p>
<p>Improving Cultural Competence: Quick Guide for Clinicians Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration</p>	<p>This guide defines cultural competence, describes how to develop cultural awareness, provides core competencies for staff, and provides strategies for organizations to develop and implement culturally responsive practices. The guide is designed for behavioral health clinicians.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building trust with families Cultural competence 	<p>Section 5</p>
<p>National Parent Leadership Institute National Parent Leadership Institute</p>	<p>The National Parent Leadership Institute is a parent-centered, anti-racist organization that partners with parents and communities to equip families with the civic skills, knowledge, and opportunities to be leading advocates for children at home, at school, and in the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building trust with families Building families’ capacity 	<p>Section 8</p>
<p>Meaningful Parent Leadership: Building Effective Parent/Practitioner Collaboration Friends National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention</p>	<p>This practical guidebook for parents and practitioners details how to build cross-cultural, inclusive relationships; recruit and train parent leaders; and prepare staff for partnering with parent leaders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging families in program improvement Cultural competence Building families’ capacity 	<p>Section 8</p>
<p>Gathering and Using Family Input to Improve Child Support and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Services: Approaches from the Human Services Field U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation</p>	<p>This brief describes how human services programs, including TANF and child support, engage families in program improvement. It also summarizes how programs have built trust with families in support of and through their program improvement efforts. The brief summarizes a literature scan of academic and nonacademic literature and interviews with several state, county, and Tribal human services programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging families in program improvement Building trust with families 	<p>Section 4, Section 5</p>
<p>Principles of Community Engagement Clinical and Translational Science Awards Consortium Community Engagement Key Function Committee Task Force</p>	<p>This resource is a comprehensive guide for planning and managing engagement efforts, including principles for engaging culturally and experientially diverse communities, and examples of researchers overcoming obstacles to working with different communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging families in program improvement Building trust with families Cultural competence 	<p>Not referenced</p>

Child Support Program: What Families Engaging in Program Improvement Might Need to Know

Child support basics

- The national child support program is overseen by the [Office of Child Support Enforcement \(OCSE\) in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#).
- In recent years, child support has served about 20 percent of children in the United States,¹ and 91 percent of people who paid child support were fathers.²

Goals of child support³

Encourage responsible parenting, family self-sufficiency, and child well-being.

Recognize the essential role of both parents in supporting their children.

The federal government's role

- OCSE develops policy and oversees the child support operations of states, tribes, territories, and the District of Columbia. OCSE does not provide services directly to families.
- OCSE pays a majority of state program operating costs, creates policy guidance, and conducts audits of state programs, among other roles.⁵
- OCSE plays a similar role in support Tribal child support programs, including sharing best practices, providing training, convening program leaders, and reviewing and providing guidance on tribal plans and policies.⁶
- States receive extra funding from the federal government if they meet performance measures related to establishing paternity, the number of cases that have child support orders, collections on current and past due child support that parents owe, and how cost-effective their programs are.⁷

Recently, OCSE has encouraged states to adopt more family-centered child support practices and policies.⁴

For example, in 2022 OCSE released a [toolkit to help child support professionals engage people with lived experience](#) in the child support program.

The role of states and tribes in child support⁸

- Child support is administered at the state, county, territory, or tribal level. Each state and Tribal child support agency operates under a plan that is approved by OCSE. State legislatures often set and approve changes to program policies.
- Child support agencies do not represent one parent or party; they aim to meet needs of the child.
- States set their own guidelines for how much child support should be paid to the custodial parent based on the financial situation of both parents and the time they each spend with the child(ren).
- Agencies are allowed to—and in some cases, required to—charge fees to parents who receive services. Parents who receive TANF benefits do not pay fees.

¹ Congressional Research Service. "[The Child Support Enforcement Program](#)." 2021.

² Grall, T. "[Support Providers: 2013](#)." 2018.

³ Office of Child Support Enforcement. "OCSE Fact Sheet." N.d.

⁴ Ascend | The Aspen Institute. "[Centering Child in Child Support Policy](#)." 2020.

⁵ Office of Child Support Enforcement. "[Child Support Handbook](#)." N.d.

⁶ Office of Child Support Enforcement, "[Tribal Child Support Programs](#)." 2021.

⁷ National Conference of State Legislatures. "[Child Support Tutorial](#)." 2021.

⁸ National Conference of State Legislatures. "[Child Support Tutorial](#)." 2021.

- Agencies collect and disburse support payments. Payments are commonly collected through wage withholding.
- All local agencies must offer the following services:
 - Locating parents with whom the child does not live
 - Establishing paternity
 - Establishing and modifying child support orders
 - Collecting support payments and enforcing child support orders
 - Establishing and modifying medical child support orders
- Agencies can help families that are at risk of experiencing domestic violence safely obtain child support. These families may receive a good cause exemption to cooperation requirements (see box). Check out [these resources](#) for staff and families.

Variation in child support programs

- **Programs can be administered by states or counties.** In county-administered programs, requirements and procedures can be different in each county.¹¹
- Some programs use the court system for establishing paternity, establishing and modifying orders, and enforcing orders (these are called **judicial systems**); others are able to do all or many of these activities in state or county child support offices (called **administrative systems**).¹²
- Thirty-two states operate **employment programs** for parents who pay child support, including for parents who are having a hard time paying.¹³ Sometimes participation is required. Services and availability vary by state or county.
- Establishing **parenting time** is not a standardized part of the child support process, but many programs are moving toward incorporating parenting time in child support orders and most states include credit for parenting time when determining child support order amounts.¹⁴
- Many child support agencies partner with **fatherhood programs** that provide education and services related to responsible fatherhood and healthy relationships.¹⁵

Use these resources to learn more about child support in your state:

- Search for your area’s program using the [Intergovernmental Reference Guide](#) and read detailed information about the program
- OCSE has [contact information for state and tribal child support programs](#)
- Check your area’s child support agency website to learn more

TANF and Medicaid Cooperation Requirements^{9,10}

- **Parents who receive TANF are required to cooperate with child support.** For example, a parent may be asked to provide information about the other parent to help establish a child support order. If they do not, parents risk losing TANF benefits, although there are some exceptions.
- Under federal law, TANF recipients are required to assign their rights to their child support payments to the state. Therefore, **in order to receive TANF, a parent who receives child support payments gives up their right to collect those payments.** Some states keep the money from families’ child support payments to repay the state for the TANF benefits it pays to those same families. However, other states “pass through” part of child support payments to the family who receives TANF. Search [here](#) for your program’s pass-through policies; review Program Category 8: “Distribution.”
- Parents who receive Medicaid and child support are required to cooperate with the state child support agency. These parents must assign their rights to medical child support to the state.
- Other public assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, may also have cooperation requirements. See [this brief](#) for more information.

⁹ National Conference of State Legislatures. “[Child Support Tutorial](#).” 2021.

¹⁰ Office of Child Support Enforcement. “[Child Support Handbook](#).” N.d.

¹¹ National Conference of State Legislatures. “[Child Support Tutorial](#).” 2021.

¹² National Conference of State Legislatures. “[Child Support Process: Administrative vs. Judicial](#).” 2017.

¹³ Office of Child Support Enforcement. “[Child Support-Led Employment Programs by State](#).” 2022

¹⁴ Selekman, R., and L. Antelo. “[Coordinating Parenting Time and Child Support: Experiences and Lessons Learned From Three States](#).” 2020.

¹⁵ Office of Child Support Enforcement. “[Fatherhood](#).” 2021.

TANF Cash Assistance Program: What Families Engaging in Program Improvement Might Need to Know

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) basics

TANF is a block grant administered by the [Office of Family Assistance, in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#). States, tribes, and territories use the funding to support many programs and services, including TANF cash assistance, which are designed to help families achieve self-sufficiency and meet at least one of the following statutory purposes of the program.

Goals of TANF block grant funding¹



The federal government's role

- It provides TANF block grant funding to states, tribes, and territories but does not specify what proportion of the funding must be used for TANF cash assistance.
- It monitors compliance with the core statutory and regulatory rules around TANF cash assistance.
- Some of the federal government's core requirements for cash assistance funded by federal TANF² block grant funds³ are as follows:



Lifetime benefit limits: States and territories cannot provide cash assistance from federal TANF funds for longer than 60 months to a family that includes an adult receiving federally funded assistance. There can be exceptions based on hardship or if states or tribes use their own money to provide assistance.



Immigrant eligibility: States, tribes, and territories cannot use federal TANF funding to assist most people with "qualified" immigration status until they have been in the United States for at least five years. Individuals who do not have a documented immigration status cannot receive TANF, although family members who are citizens (for example, children born in the U.S.) may be eligible.



Federal work rates: A certain percentage of the families with a work-eligible individual must be engaged in work activities (called a "work participation rate"). The federal government can penalize states, tribes, and territories that do not meet their target rate.

The role of states, tribes, and territories

- States, tribes, and territories have a lot of control over how they spend federal TANF funding and what their TANF cash assistance programs look like. State legislatures often set and approve changes to program policies.
- States and territories must spend some of their own money on programs for families experiencing economic hardships, which may include their TANF cash assistance program.

¹ Office of Family Assistance. "About TANF." 2022. Note: these goals were established in 1996, at the same time as the TANF program itself.

² Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "Policy Basics: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families." 2022

³ States and tribes may provide services beyond these requirements and limitations if they use other sources of funding.

- States, tribes, and territories have used their federal TANF block grant and state funds for a variety of services and supports, including:
 - ✓ Cash assistance
 - ✓ Education and job training
 - ✓ Child care
 - ✓ Transportation
 - ✓ Aid to children at risk of abuse and neglect
 - ✓ A variety of other services to help families experiencing economic hardships

What do states, tribes, and territories get to decide for their TANF cash assistance programs?

- **What to call their TANF cash assistance programs.** For example, North Carolina’s program is “Work First,” Louisiana’s is “Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program,” and Utah’s is “TANF.”
- **How to determine who is eligible to receive benefits.** States, tribes, and territories decide on the income level that qualifies a family and how assets count during eligibility.⁶
- **Monthly cash benefit amounts.** As of July 2021, the maximum monthly benefit for a single-parent family of three with no earnings was lowest in Arkansas (\$204) and highest in New Hampshire (\$1,098). The median monthly benefit across all states was \$498.⁷
- **Lifetime limits on receiving TANF benefits** (if shorter than the federal limit of 60 months) and periodic time limits.⁸
- **Specific work-related activities that applicants and recipients are required to complete.** States must require adult recipients to engage in work activities, typically for 20–30 hours each week. There are 12 activities that can count toward federal work rates.⁹
- **The sanctions they impose** (reductions in or loss of benefits) if someone does not meet the requirements without good cause.
- **Who must participate in work activities.** Some programs exempt people who are over 60, pregnant or recovering from childbirth, caring for a disabled family member, or diagnosed with a medical condition that limits their ability to work.
- **How much authority counties have in administering TANF benefits.** In 10 states, TANF cash assistance is county administered, meaning counties have flexibility in how they serve families.

More about TANF cash assistance

- TANF’s primary accountability measure, the work participation rate, does not reflect families’ employment outcomes after leaving the program—it only looks at what activities families do while receiving benefits.
- In 2020, for every 100 families with children who were experiencing poverty nationwide, only 21 received TANF cash assistance.⁴
- Nearly half of TANF cases are “child-only,” which can happen when children who receive benefits live with a non-parent relative or their parent is ineligible to receive benefits.⁵

Use these resources to learn more about TANF:

- For more about your local program, see the Office of Family Assistance’s [list of state and Tribal programs](#)
- Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation [Reflecting on 25 Years of TANF Research](#)
- Center for Law and Social Policy [TANF 101: Policy Briefs on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#)
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities [Policy Basics: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#)

⁴ Azevedo-McCaffrey, D., and A. Safawi. “[To Promote Equity, States Should Invest More TANF Dollars in Basic Assistance.](#)” 2022.

⁵ Golden, O., and A. Hawkins. “[TANF Child-Only Cases.](#)” 2012.

⁶ Knowles, S., I. Dehry, K. Shantz, and S. Minton. “[Graphical Overview of State TANF Policies as of July 2020.](#)” 2022.

⁷ Safawi, A., and C. Reyes. “[States Must Continue Recent Momentum to Further Improve TANF Benefit Levels.](#)” 2021.

⁸ Knowles, S., I. Dehry, K. Shantz, and S. Minton. “[Graphical Overview of State TANF Policies as of July 2020.](#)” 2022.

⁹ National Association of Counties. “[Counties and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program.](#)” 2018.

Family Input Toolbox: Collecting Families' Feedback

Resource name and source	Resource description	Resource topics	Where referenced
IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation International Association for Public Participation	The spectrum was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging families in program improvement 	Section 4
Gathering and Using Family Input to Improve Child Support and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Services: Approaches from the Human Services Field U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation	This brief describes how human services programs, including TANF and child support, engage families in program improvement. It also summarizes how programs have built trust with families in support of and through their program improvement efforts. The brief summarizes a literature scan of academic and nonacademic literature and interviews with several state, county, and Tribal human services programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging families in program improvement Building trust with families 	Section 4, Section 5
Data Collection for Program Evaluation Northwest Center for Public Health Practice	This overview summarizes a variety of data collection activities, including when to use them, their advantages and disadvantages, tips, and examples.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys Interviews Focus groups Document review Observation 	Not referenced
Online Survey Data Collection Brief U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Population Affairs	This brief shares considerations and best practices for designing surveys and collecting survey data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys 	Section 7
Data Collection Methods for Program Evaluation: Questionnaires brief U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	This brief includes an overview of surveys, when to use surveys, how to plan and develop them, and the advantages and disadvantages of administering surveys.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys 	Section 7

Resource name and source	Resource description	Resource topics	Where referenced
Checklist to Evaluate the Quality of Questions U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	This tip sheet identifies key questions to consider to evaluate the quality of the survey questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Document review 	Section 7
OPA Youth Listening Session Toolkit U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Population Affairs	This tip sheet describes listening sessions, including how to plan and conduct them and making program improvements based on the information heard during the listening sessions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening sessions • Engaging families in program improvement • Building trust with families 	Section 7
OPA Evaluation Interviewing Tip Sheet U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Population Affairs	This tip sheet describes interviews, when to conduct them, how to prepare for and conduct an interview, and frequently asked questions about interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews 	Section 7
Empathy Interviews Learning Forward	This guide describes how to prepare for and conduct empathy interviews, one-on-one conversations that use open-ended questions to elicit stories about specific experiences that help uncover unacknowledged needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews 	Not referenced
OPA Evaluation Focus Group Tip Sheet U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Population Affairs	This tip sheet describes focus groups, when to conduct them, how to prepare for and conduct a focus group, and frequently asked questions about focus groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups 	Section 7
A Graphic and Tactile Data Elicitation Tool for Qualitative Research: The Life Story Board Forum: Qualitative Social Research	This tool is designed to help create a visual representation of a person’s narrative or story and their related context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life story boards 	Section 9
DrawingOut—An innovative drawing workshop method to support the generation and dissemination of research findings PLOS ONE	This article describes a drawing workshop approach to gathering information about individuals' sensitive health experiences through artwork containing both visuals and text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing workshops 	Section 9
A Guide to Forming Advisory Boards for Family-Serving Organizations The National Child Traumatic Stress Network	This guide provides a list of things to consider as programs think about developing advisory boards. It describes decisions programs will need to make along the way and trade-offs for those decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory boards 	Section 8

Resource name and source	Resource description	Resource topics	Where referenced
Child Welfare Family Leadership Model North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services	This is a presentation on North Carolina’s Child Welfare Family Leadership Model, including core elements of the model, elements contributing to genuine collaboration in the model, and how to identify readiness for the model and implementation considerations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory boards • Building families’ capacity • Engaging families in program improvement 	Section 8, Section 9
Community Advisory Council Community Advisory Council’s Charter Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support, Community Advisory Council	This website describes Michigan’s Child Support Community Advisory Council and the Council Charter describing the council’s purpose, operations, membership, budget, and authority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory boards • Building families’ capacity • Building trust with families • Engaging families in program improvement 	Section 9
Family Voice Compass Family Voice Council’s Charter Family Voice Council Report Plan for the Future Colorado Department of Human Services, Family Voice Council	This website contains a wealth of resources on how to get started in developing a family advisory council, ways for program staff to shift power to families while working with an advisory council, and examples of how to use and share results. It includes many example documents and templates for tasks related to creating and supporting an advisory council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory boards • Building families’ capacity • Building trust with families • Engaging families in program improvement 	Section 9
Family and Community Engagement Plan Colorado Department of Human Services	This report describes the Colorado Department of Human Services agency-wide engagement plans, including alignment of specific strategies and activities to the Family Voice Council’s strategic plan, responsible individuals and groups, and specific performance measures for success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory boards • Building trust with families • Engaging families in program improvement 	Section 9
Community Advisory Board Toolkit Tennessee Department of Children’s Services	This toolkit includes details about how Community Advisory Boards work with Tennessee Department of Children’s Services staff, including goals, recommendations, sample documents, membership guidelines, proposed meeting structures, and bylaws.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory boards • Engaging families in program improvement 	Not referenced
Tools and Resources for Project-Based Community Advisory Boards Urban Institute	This toolkit provides resources for planning, forming, and operating a community advisory board. It includes considerations, a readiness checklist, compensation guidance, and other tools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory boards • Engaging families in program improvement • Building trust with families 	Not referenced

Survey Tips for TANF and Child Support Programs^{1,2,3}

Surveys are structured questionnaires that can help you gather feedback from families to improve your program. Surveys focus on a topic or set of topics and can range in the number of questions asked, the types of questions (closed-ended or open-ended), and the ways the survey is administered (web, paper, or over the phone).

Considerations for when to use surveys

Use surveys when . . .	Do not use surveys when . . .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ You want to gather information from many people in a short period of time with limited resources ✓ You want to be able to generalize (at least somewhat) about the thoughts, opinions, or perspectives of a large group of people ✓ You want the option for responses to be anonymous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ You want to capture detailed information about lived experiences, perspectives, and/or lessons learned ✗ You want to ask personal or sensitive questions

Preparing for a survey

- Identify what you want to learn about improving your program from the survey and what types of families can provide that information.
 - Consider families with diverse perspectives and experiences with the program.
- Determine whether surveys will be anonymous.
- Plan how you will invite families to participate.
 - For example, will you send an email blast, will case managers tell families about it, or something else?
- Identify a mode (web, paper, or phone) that will make it easy for families to participate.
 - Online surveys can be very easy for program staff to create, manage, and analyze. However, program staff should consider how easily families can access a computer or the Internet.
 - See this [Online Survey Data Collection Brief](#) for more about creating online surveys, including choosing a data collection platform.
- Determine when and how often you want families to take the survey.
- Identify how you will compensate families for their time, including for anonymous surveys.

Consider whether your survey can be anonymous. Families may feel more comfortable providing honest responses on an anonymous survey.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “[Data Collection Methods for Program Evaluation: Questionnaires.](#)” 2018.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “[Checklist to Evaluate the Quality of Questions.](#)” 2018.

³ Office of Population Affairs. “[Online Survey Data Collection Brief.](#)” 2021.

Considerations for web-based versus paper surveys

Web-based surveys	Paper surveys
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select a platform to create and deploy the survey. If your survey is simple, a free service is likely fine. Complex surveys may require a paid service. • Determine how you will share the survey link with families (for example, email, text, QR code). • Identify staff who will program the survey. • Identify staff who will manage the survey, including checking response rates and data quality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Format the survey so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Instructions to respondents are clear. – Respondents enter responses in a standardized way. • Determine how to distribute and collect surveys (especially if they are anonymous). • Determine how to enter data from completed surveys and who will be responsible.

Designing your survey

- Identify a target survey length (how long it takes to complete). The shorter the survey is, the easier it is for families to complete and the more responses you can expect to receive.
- Based on what you want to learn from families, draft survey questions. See the next page for an example questionnaire.
 - Ask questions in the simplest way possible that aligns with your learning goals.
 - Ask questions in an order that makes sense to the person completing the survey. Group similar topics together. Ask more-sensitive questions at the end of the survey.
 - Structure questions in a way that is easy to interpret responses.
 - Ask more closed-ended questions (select from a list of answers) than open-ended questions (write a response).
 - Avoid surveys with many medium- and high-burden questions (for example, questions that ask respondents to write, assess, evaluate, compare, or reference outside information).
 - Learn more about designing your survey and writing survey questions in the [Data Collection Methods for Program Evaluation: Questionnaires brief](#) and the [Checklist to Evaluate the Quality of Questions](#).
- Have a few people who are unfamiliar with the survey pre-test the survey to ensure questions are easy to understand, it is easy to complete, and it takes about the amount of time you expect.
 - Revise the survey based on the feedback you receive from the people who pre-test the survey.

Example survey: Improving orientation

Welcome to the [program name] Orientation Feedback Survey. We want to know how we can improve our orientation session for new participants. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with us today.

Your responses are anonymous. Taking this survey is optional. Your benefits will not be affected by your decision to take this survey or by anything you share in this survey.

This survey should take less than five minutes to complete.

1. Have you attended an orientation session in the past month?

- Yes
- No [will take respondents to the end of the survey]

2. Which of the following topics were covered in your orientation session? *Select all that apply.*

- Program goals
- Program rules
- Available referral services
- Role of your case manager
- Participation requirements
- Other: _____

3. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

The orientation session helped me understand what to expect from this program.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

4. How many days did you wait to meet with your case manager after attending orientation?

|_|_| days

5. What could we change about orientation to make it more useful and welcoming?

Thank you for completing this survey! Please place your survey in the survey bin at the reception desk.

Survey tips

- ← Explain the purpose of the survey
- ← Explicitly tell families whether their responses are anonymous or whether their answers can affect their program standing or benefits
- ← Tell families how long the survey will take to complete
- ← Responses can be yes/no (low burden)
- ← Responses can be a list of options where respondents can choose more than one option (low burden)
 - Include an “other” option where respondents can write in an answer if you are unsure if your list of response options is comprehensive
- ← Responses can be scales or on a continuum (medium burden)
 - Scales should have an even number of “positive” and “negative” response options
 - You can add an “N/A” option if the question is not relevant to all respondents
- ← Responses can be numbers (low burden)
- ← Responses can be open-ended (high burden)
- ← Thank participants for their time and provide instructions for submitting their completed survey

Focus Group Tips for TANF and Child Support Programs¹

Focus groups offer a useful way to engage families for feedback about how to improve your program when you want to:

- Hear from several families at once
- Offer families an opportunity to react and respond to one another

Focus groups are guided conversations about a topic or set of topics with a small group of people (usually 5–8). They typically last 60–90 minutes.

Considerations for when to use focus groups

Use focus groups when . . .	Do not use focus groups when . . .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ You’re looking for a broad range of detailed views ✓ You want to capture this broad range of views over a short period of time ✓ You want to capture lived experiences and lessons learned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ You want to learn about personal or sensitive topics ✗ You want to collect information from a large group of people over a short period of time ✗ You want to understand the “average” or “typical” experience of a large group of people

Preparing for focus groups

General planning

- **Identify what you want to learn about improving your program** from the focus group and what types of families can provide that information.
 - Consider families with diverse perspectives and experiences with the program.
- **Draft a discussion guide** to structure the conversation.
 - See the last page of this tool for an example discussion guide.
- **Identify who is most appropriate to facilitate the focus group** and who will take notes.
 - Consider providing time for the facilitator to attend a training if no staff have facilitation experience.
- **Decide whether you will record the conversation**, but consider skipping this step if you expect that families may be nervous or hesitant about being recorded.
- **Develop a plan for sharing next steps with families** at the end of each focus group.
 - This may be as simple as describing high-level takeaways from the conversation and asking if you missed anything to sharing how you will report back to families the outcomes resulting from their feedback and when.

To the extent possible, select a focus group facilitator who is not in a position of power over families.

Families should see the facilitator as neutral and not as someone who can affect a family’s standing or benefits in the program.

Logistics

- **Identify a time and venue comfortable for families** and make it easy for them to participate.
 - Consider community settings if they are more appropriate and identify any additional supports families need to be able to attend (for example, child care or a meal). Focus groups longer than 60 minutes may be difficult for families to attend.

¹ Office of Population Affairs. “[Focus Group Tip Sheet](#).” 2020.

- **Identify how you will compensate families** for their time and how the compensation approach you select might impact the benefits or eligibility of participants.
 - Ideally, select an approach that will not affect families’ eligibility or benefits. If that is not possible, clearly explain this to families before they agree to participate.
- **Plan how you will recruit families to participate.** Consider asking trusted community leaders to weigh in on recruitment plans and to potentially support recruitment efforts.
- **Develop recruitment materials** that explain:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reasons for gathering input – How the input will be used – Time commitment and compensation for participating, including potential impact of the compensation on their benefits or eligibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Who is gathering the input – Answers to frequently asked questions that address potential concerns families might have about participating
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Leading focus groups

An important decision to make is whether you will hold the focus group in person or virtually.

- In-person focus groups make it easier to connect with families, read their body language during the conversation, and engage them in the conversation. Families do not need technology to participate.
- Virtual focus groups can be more convenient for families because they do not have to travel to participate. Virtual focus groups rely on families’ access to virtual meeting platforms, such as Zoom, to participate.

We describe additional logistical considerations for in-person and virtual focus groups below.

Logistical considerations for in-person versus virtual focus groups

In-person focus groups	Virtual focus groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reserve a private and quiet space that is large enough for the group to participate comfortably. • If you are planning to record, test the recording device before the focus group and make sure it is set up in a space where all voices will be audible. • Prepare for the focus group early and arrive at the meeting space before the focus group begins to arrange seating and make the space comfortable for the group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a virtual meeting platform that will be easy for families to access and use. • Share easy-to-understand instructions (with screenshots of key functions) with the participants about how to use the platform. • Include time to support technical issues before and during the focus group. • Ask participants to join with video, if possible.

- Regardless of whether you choose in-person or virtual, **facilitating focus groups is a skill to develop.** Although we include some tips to the right, we encourage staff to observe a trained focus group facilitator or seek out more information on facilitating focus groups.
 - This [Focus Group Tip Sheet](#) has additional information on conducting focus groups.

Tips for facilitating focus groups

- Manage your time. Let participants know when you need to move to a new question.
- Encourage quieter participants to share.
- Ask only one question at a time.
- Look for visual cues of agreement, disagreement, or confusion.
- Be willing to ask questions out of order to follow the flow of the conversation.

Example focus group discussion guide: Improving case management services

Thank you so much for joining us today. My name is [facilitator's name], and I am [facilitator's role within organization/program]. I'm going to be leading today's conversation. This is [notetaker's name]. They are [notetaker's role within organization/ program] and will be taking notes. We appreciate the time you have set aside to speak with us today and will not keep you longer than 60 minutes.

Today we'd like to learn more about your experiences with your case manager. We are trying to understand how we can improve our services and how our case managers work with families and connect them to supports. We plan to use your feedback to identify what we are doing well and where we could improve. What you share today is going to be very helpful during this process. We plan to summarize what we learn today and share it with [name groups who will hear the feedback]. After hearing your feedback, we will [provide overview of next steps after completing focus groups].

We will not use your names in anything that we share with program staff or publicly, and your name will not be attached to anything you say today. Your case or benefits will not be affected by anything you share. We encourage you to be honest so that we are able to learn from your experiences.

We would like to record the conversation today, so that we don't miss anything in our notes. We won't share the recording with anyone and will delete it as soon as we have finished writing our notes. Is everyone comfortable with us recording the conversation? (*Press Record if yes.*)

1. To get us started, let's go around and have you all introduce yourselves. Please share your first name and how long you've been involved in [program name].
2. Before you met your case manager, what were your expectations for working with your case manager? What did you think they would do?
3. Tell me about your first meeting with your case manager. What did you discuss? How did the meeting make you feel?
4. How helpful has your case manager been in connecting you with the services and supports you need or want? Are there ways to make it easier for you to get the referrals you need?
5. How easy or difficult is it to communicate with your case manager? What makes it easy? What makes it difficult?
6. How would you describe your relationship with your case manager? What would you like to be different?
7. How has your relationship with your case manager affected your experience in [program]?
8. If you could change one thing about what your case manager does or how they work with you, what would it be? Why?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share that you have not yet shared today?

Those are all the questions I have. Thank you again so much for your time. Your feedback will be incredibly helpful as we work to improve our case management services! [Share details about how participants will be compensated. Share details about how you will use the feedback and next steps in program improvement process.]

Discussion guide tips**Modify this conversation guide for your program and topic of interest!**

- ← Introduce yourself and commit to a time limit for the discussion
- ← Explain the purpose of the conversation and how you will use the information
- ← Explicitly tell families whether their names will be shared or whether what they say can affect their program standing or benefits
- ← Ask for permission to record
- ← Start with a warm-up question that is easy for everyone to answer
- ← Ask open-ended questions ("how," "why," "tell me about," "to what extent," etc.)
- ← Keep questions simple, using language that is easy to understand
- ← Aim for 5–8 substantive questions discussion questions for a 60-minute conversation
- ← Ask questions that could be more sensitive later in the conversation
- ← End the discussion with a broad wrap-up question
- ← Thank participants for their time and compensate them
- ← Share details about how you will use feedback and program improvement next steps

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