

Considerations for Identifying Performance Measures in TANF Pilot Programs

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Under the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 (FRA), the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will select up to five states[1] to pilot a new set of outcome-based Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) performance measures instead of being held accountable to the Work Participation Rate (WPR). Strong performance measurement can help states identify challenges within their TANF programs, work toward evidence-informed solutions, and achieve program goals.[2,3,4,5] The FRA presents an opportunity to build new evidence on whether holding TANF programs accountable for outcome measures, rather than the process-focused WPR, leads to stronger employment outcomes and reduced dependency.

Terms used in this resource

- **Performance measures:** The metrics used to assess whether pilot states and their programs are achieving the intended results. Measures typically include the focal population (such as work-eligible individuals), an observable outcome (such as earnings), and the time period for assessment (such as the second quarter after exiting the program).
- **Performance benchmarks:** The value of performance measures that pilot states will be held accountable for achieving.
- **Outcomes:** The observable changes or benefits brought about by the program for individual TANF participants in employment, earnings, or family stability and well-being.

Pilot states will be accountable for four new performance measures related to participants' employment, earnings, and dependence on government benefits. In addition to these required measures, states will propose *two additional performance measures* related to employment and reduced dependency, education and skill building, health and family relationships, or another relevant domain. Pilot states will receive support from ACF and its technical assistance contractors in refining proposed performance measures, negotiating benchmarks, determining data sources, and finalizing their performance measurement plans.

This brief is intended to be a helpful resource for TANF administrators and program staff who are considering which additional performance measures to propose as part of their state's FRA pilot application. It outlines key considerations for identifying the additional performance measures and provides guiding questions and examples for states to reflect on as they develop their pilot applications. Working through these questions can help states identify measures that:



Align with program goals



Are straightforward to interpret and use



Are based on information that is feasible to gather

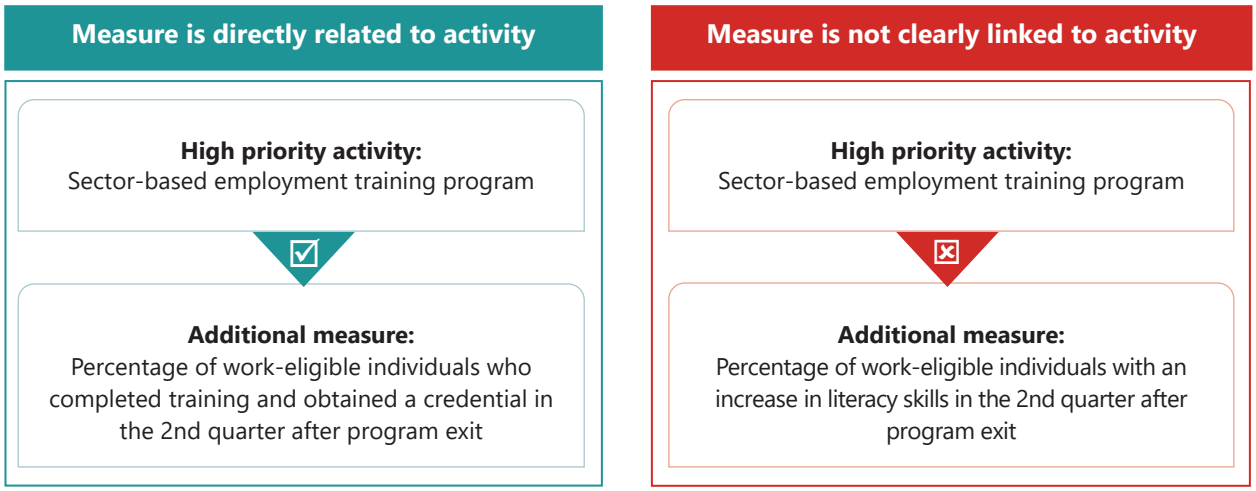


Accurately capture participant outcomes

Identifying measures that align with program goals

Performance measures are meant to help states assess progress toward program goals and provide a meaningful picture of performance across the areas the program is intended to influence.[2,6]

- **Will TANF participants engage in pilot activities that are likely to directly affect the state's additional measures?**
- **Will the measures help assess progress toward the program's pilot goals?** For example, are the measures aligned with the highest priority activities and outcomes the state seeks to affect through the pilot?
- **Will enough TANF participants engage in related activities and/or receive related benefits or services that the state can expect to see a change in the additional measures?**
- **Are there important program pilot goals that are not reflected in the required performance measures, which the additional measures could focus on?**



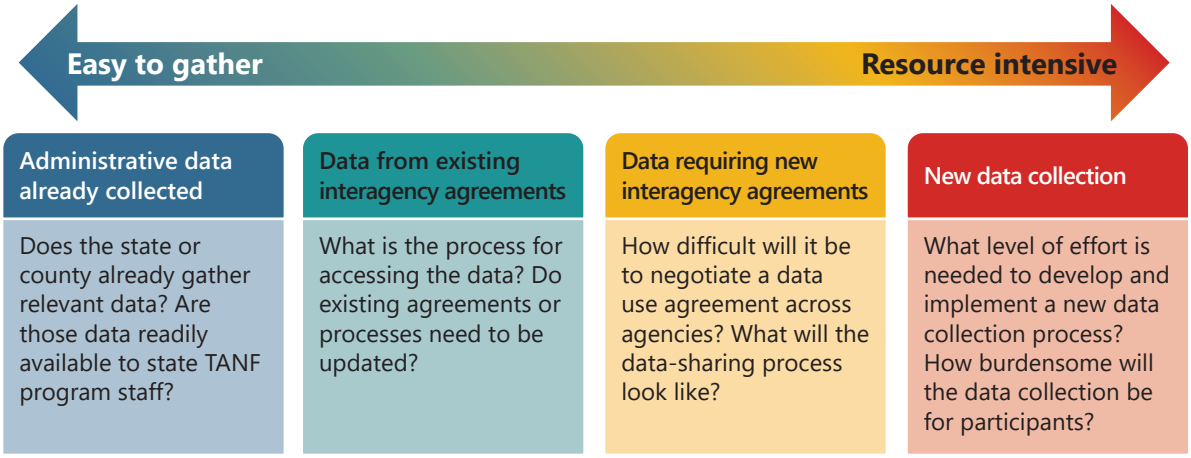
Identifying measures that are straightforward to interpret and use

Simple, clear, and distinct measures can make it easier for states to assess performance over time and identify potential improvements to their pilot programming.[3]

- **Are the additional measures distinct, with each measure reflecting a different area of program performance?** For example, are the additional measures redundant with, or in conflict with, the four required measures?
- **Will the data collection happen when the activities linked to the measure are likely to have made a difference for participants?** For example, if the measure is assessing completion of a six-month training program, will the data be collected after the program ends?
- **Will the frequency of data collection allow the state to review measures regularly and reflect on how any changes in measures may be influenced by program activities?** For example, will the data collection and review process happen monthly or quarterly?
- **Do the additional measures align with outcomes that are within the program's control?** For example, are there policies or circumstances outside the control of the TANF program that could influence the measure and therefore make it more difficult to determine whether any changes in the measure are related to the program?

Identifying measures that are based on information that is feasible to gather

In proposing performance measures, pilot states may consider the feasibility of gathering relevant data, including the resources, staff capacity, and staff training and support required to collect the data, and how burdensome collecting the information might be to participants.[4,7] The graphic below provides a spectrum of illustrative examples, along with reflection questions to help identify data that would be feasible for the state to gather. States can also consider proposing additional measures that use data from the National Directory of New Hires and can be computed by ACF on behalf of the state.[8]



Identifying measures that accurately capture participant outcomes

Identifying measures that are likely to be based on complete, high-quality data can help states to accurately capture changes in participant outcomes.[5] Data quality affects the time and effort needed to process, analyze, and report on the performance measures.[7]

- **Are the data collection tools appropriate for TANF participants?** For example, if the state plans to use a new assessment, is the assessment appropriate for the participants' typical age and reading level?
- **Are the data collected in a standard way throughout the state with clear definitions and specifications?** For example, do some counties collect the data differently than others, such as at different points in time or using different response options?
- **Do the data require intensive cleaning to prepare for analysis and reporting?**
- **Are the data available for all or most TANF participants?**

About Project SUPPORTT

To maximize the lessons learned from the FRA pilots, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is overseeing Project SUPPORTT (Supporting Pilot Program Outcomes, Research, and Technical Assistance in TANF). The goal of Project SUPPORTT is to design implementation and outcome studies of the pilot programs and provide research, evaluation, and data-related technical assistance to pilot states. OPRE has contracted with Mathematica, The Adjacent Possible, and the American Public Human Services Association to conduct this work. In implementing the pilot programs, states will also receive support from the TANF Outcomes Technical Assistance and Logistics (TOTAL) project funded by the Office of Family Assistance and led by MEF Associates.

Key takeaways and other resources for pilot applicants

Identifying additional performance measures that are **(1) aligned with program goals, (2) straightforward to interpret and use, (3) based on information that is feasible to gather, and (4) accurate reflections of participant outcomes** will help states as they consider how to assess progress toward promoting stronger participant employment outcomes and reduced dependency. The key considerations, guiding questions, and examples in this brief aim to support states as they decide which additional performance measures to propose as part of their FRA pilot applications. The FRA pilot application site includes other resources that could be useful to states as they develop their pilot applications.

Endnotes

[1] In accordance with Title IV-A of the Social Security Act, states is defined as the 50 States of the United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa. See 42 U.S.C. 619 (5).

[2] Hahn, Heather, Teresa Derrick-Mills, and Shayne Spaulding. "Measuring Employment Outcomes in TANF." OPRE Report #2018-74. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018. https://acf.gov/opre/report/measuring-employment-outcomes-tanf

[3] Hahn, H., and P. Loprest. "Improving State TANF Performance Measures." Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011. https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/improving-state-tanf-performance-measures-0

[4] Kirby, G., E. Brown, and K. Conroy. "Aligning Federal Performance Indicators Across Programs Promoting Self-Sufficiency: Actionable Steps for Program Design and Practice." Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019. https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/aligning-federal-performance-indicators-across-programs-promoting-self-sufficiency-actionable-steps

[5] Borden, William S. "The Challenges of Measuring Performance." In The Workforce Investment Act: Implementation Experiences and Evaluation Findings, edited by Douglas J. Besharov and Phoebe H. Cottingham. W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2011, pp. 177–208. https://doi.org/10.17848/9780880994026.ch7

[6] Gaffney, Angela, Asaph Glosser, and Crystal Agoncillo. "Organizational Culture in TANF Offices: A Review of the Literature." OPRE Report #2018-116. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018. https://acf.gov/opre/report/organizational-culture-tanf-offices-review-literature

[7] Goerge, G., E. Wiegand, and L. Gjertson. "Unpacking Data Use in State TANF Agencies: Insights from the TANF Data Innovation Needs Assessment." OPRE Report #2021-94. Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021. https://acf.gov/opre/report/unpacking-data-use-state-tanf-agencies

[8] The National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) is a federally mandated repository of new hire, quarterly wage, and unemployment insurance information. ACF's Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) operates the database. By law, employers report their new hires to the State Directory of New Hires and their employees' quarterly wages to the state workforce agency. State workforce agencies also collect unemployment data. These state agencies report this information to the NDNH. Pilot states could propose a measure based on data available in the NDNH. States would need to securely share Social Security Numbers (SSNs) of participants to be counted in the measure with ACF; ACF would then match the data with NDNH records and compute the measure on behalf of the state. For more information see: https://acf.gov/css/training-technical-assistance/guide-national-directory-new-hires.

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