

TANF and Child Welfare Partnering for Prevention: Emerging Implementation and Sustainability Issues and Strategies

INTRODUCTION



The 12-month Families are Stronger Together: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Child Welfare (CW) Partnering for Prevention Learning Community (FAST-LC) presented TANF and CW programs with a unique and significant opportunity. The FAST-LC motivated, actively engaged, and supported TANF and CW collaboration and the mitigation of family involvement in the CW system. Participating state and Tribal TANF and CW programs planned and implemented innovative partnership and prevention approaches promoting family well-being. They received a diverse and robust portfolio of training and technical assistance (TTA) services, including a dedicated coaching team, during the year-long initiative. The table below identifies the nine FAST-LC sites and their TANF and Child Welfare partnerships.

FAST-LC Participating Sites	
State/Tribal TANF Program	State/Tribal Child Welfare Program
Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES)	Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS)
California Family Engagement and Empowerment Division (FEED)	California Children and Family Services Division (CFSD)
Iowa Division of Community Access (CA)	Iowa Division of Family Well-Being and Protection (FWBP)
Kentucky Division of Family Support (DFS)	Kentucky Division of Prevention and Community Well-Being (DPCW)
Michigan Economic Stability Administration	Michigan Children’s Services Administration
Oregon Self-Sufficiency Program	Oregon Child Welfare Program
West Virginia Bureau for Family Assistance	West Virginia Bureau for Social Services
Chippewa Cree Tribe Tribal TANF Department	Chippewa Cree Tribe Social Services Department
Yoeme Organization for Employment and Member Enhancement Services (YOEMES) Program	Pascua Yaqui Tribe Tribal TANF Child Welfare Program & Children’s Services

This resource highlights implementation issues and the strategies the states and Tribes participating in the FAST-LC employed in their partnership efforts and their prevention-oriented activities. It also identifies sustainability issues the sites confronted and how some of the issues were addressed.

IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

TANF and CW Collaboration Appears to Deepen Mutual Understanding and Sets the Stage for Productive Partnering



FAST-LC sites noted that collaborating across TANF and CW programs during the Learning Community increased and expanded their understanding of one another's work. Several sites pointed to learning about their partner agencies' priorities and processes as one of FAST-LC's key outcomes. Examples:

- **Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boys Reservation:** Through the FAST-LC, Chippewa Cree created a wrap-around care model in which the tribal TANF and CW programs partner with families before they reach a critical point where students are missing school and are at risk of suspension, expulsion, or experiencing Court or Social Services involvement. The wrap-around program created the opportunity for partners from schools, health centers, Tribal Court, and other departments to come together in person to introduce themselves and their departments. This helped to create greater collective understanding of how the partners can work together to get families the services and resources they need.
- **Arizona:** Arizona's FAST-LC initiative strengthened the partnership between TANF and CW services by involving important community partners, such as public housing agencies, faith-based organizations, and parents with lived experiences. The agencies collaborated to leverage an existing community hub as the focal point for resource distribution and upstream prevention strategies to support at-risk families before crises escalate.

A Chippewa Cree Tribal team member explained that collaborating across departments *“increased our awareness of the services that our partners offer and who the contact people are from each department, so that case managers know who they should refer clients to or invite to wrap-around [service planning] sessions.”*

The Arizona team shared that a ‘win’ from the project was how *“learning more about each other’s agencies opened up a door for conversation between the two agencies about what we each saw as a need from a prevention standpoint.”*

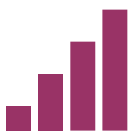
Family Engagement Contributes to a Better Understanding of the TANF and CW Systems and Strategy Development



FAST-LC sites found it especially valuable to engage families in the effort to understand the operational impact of their TANF and CW programs and systems as the basis for strengthening their partnership and planning for prevention. Several sites explained how family perspectives helped to advise and shape the partnership in developing and implementing prevention strategies, which also strengthened their public communication efforts.

- **Iowa:** The Iowa team conducted a survey and a series of listening sessions with families that produced actionable data about families' needs, goals, and the communication strategies that reach them best.
- **Kentucky:** Kentucky collected data from staff, families, and contracted providers, which the team used to develop recommendations for strategies that promote greater collaboration between divisions and reduce the stigma for families receiving services.

Developing and Piloting Innovative Service Delivery Processes Can Prevent Families from Entering the CW System



FAST-LC sites saw value in developing and implementing pilot processes to mitigate families' CW system involvement. The efforts employed several productive diversion strategies to better coordinate TANF CW system responses, primarily by addressing material hardship through the provision of concrete resources.

- **California:** California developed a joint training and resource platform to support greater consistency in proactive, prevention-oriented service delivery by California's TANF agency—California Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs)—and CW frontline staff, known as CalPrevents. This built on and advanced the state's existing Linkages initiative, a partnership model to ensure families engaged with both CalWORKs and CW are being served in a cohesive and coordinated way, and which supports consistent, prevention-oriented service delivery.
- **Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation:** Chippewa Cree piloted a 'wrap-around sessions' process with families in which members from multiple service departments come together and meet with a family to discuss issues that the family is facing and develop a comprehensive case plan to help address them.
- **Michigan:** Michigan embedded family resource specialists with child protection and foster care staff known as Family Impact Teams (FIT). This provided immediate responses to poverty-related challenges identified during CW engagements—most commonly within 30 days of a Child Protective Services investigation. Michigan also noted this immediate "poverty responsive" approach has additional downstream case practice benefits when relative placement and reunification options are considered.

Educating Agency Staff, Partners, and the Public to Better Understand the Value and Structure of Prevention Can Make a Positive Difference



Fast-LC sites took steps to educate state employees, partnering agencies, and the public regarding the benefits and structure of prevention projects and noted some early successes from these efforts. Sites' stakeholder education work included developing information sheets and other materials, holding trainings for state/local staff, and additional measures to change the public conversation about poverty and CW.

- [West Virginia](#): The West Virginia FAST-LC team created informational materials for state staff, legislators, and the public to showcase the value and benefits of prevention instead of removing children from families.
- [Kentucky](#): Kentucky developed pamphlets to explain basic eligibility rules for the Kentucky Temporary Assistance Program and other family support programs and created informational materials for the Division of Protection & Permanency prevention programs.
- [California](#): The California FAST-LC team used the CalPrevents platform to provide training and other resources to CW and CalWORKs staff to support consistent, prevention-oriented service delivery.
- [Pascua Yaqui Tribe](#): The Pascua Yaqui team developed trainings to onboard staff with an updated continuum of care framework that delineates interventive and preventative services to best meet families where they are and promote a proactive care delivery model.

Collecting and Using Data Improves TANF and CW Understanding of How Their Systems Engage



Sites used their FAST-LC projects to establish data coordination efforts and creatively collect data. Several sites collected data from families and staff to inform their initiatives, as noted earlier in this resource. Other sites worked on integrating or connecting data collection efforts between TANF and CW systems to support coordinated prevention services and case planning for families.

- [Michigan](#): During the FAST-LC, Michigan's Economic Stability Administration and Children's Services Administration undertook a large-scale effort to develop an electronic referral system for shared use, which tracks real-time data to provide a deeper understanding of families' needs.
- [Arizona](#): The Arizona team began collecting data related to its FAST-LC prevention initiative, including data on response times and service delivery at community hubs. Arizona also sought to align Department of Economic Security prevention services with broader state targets, providing a model for future data collection and resource allocation efforts.

SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

High Turnover in Key Roles Can Make TANF and CW Partnership Momentum Challenging to Sustain



FAST-LC sites found that staff turnover, both within their own agencies and in partner agencies, created challenges for sustaining their project's momentum. The California, West Virginia, and Pascua Yaqui teams all noted that losing staff in key roles—both front-line staff and leadership—had the potential to hinder partnership efforts and stall progress.

Competing Priorities Cut into Staff Bandwidth and Ongoing Partnership Engagement

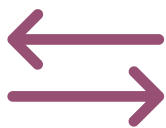
FAST-LC sites frequently noted that it was a challenge to stay focused on the long-term goals of the FAST-LC in the face of urgent issues. Some FAST-LC site teams were juggling multiple competing priorities and significant demands on their time, and sometimes this caused interruptions and delays in project work.



Entrenched Beliefs About Families Living in Poverty and the Inertia of Large State Systems Complicates Prevention Partnerships

Some sites found that they faced headwinds in the form of biases key audiences or partners appeared to hold about families living in poverty. For example, the Arizona and West Virginia teams noted that they were sometimes challenged to contextualize the value of prevention efforts to key partners, such as state legislatures. Sites also noted that changing the way large state systems operate is a complex, multi-year effort.

Securing or Maintaining Funding for Prevention Efforts Is Challenging



Sites sometimes found it challenging to obtain and maintain funding for prevention pilots. Michigan, for example, noted that the lack of funding for their FAST-LC initiative impacts the ability to expand. Arizona also emphasized the need to explore alternative sources of funding because of an unexpected funding shortfall for prevention efforts.



Realigning Systems Toward Prevention Requires a Significant Change in Mindset



FAST-LC sites emphasized that shifting from thinking and speaking about CW from a “prevention” perspective—and seeing TANF as a key resource in prevention—required partners to reimagine these systems in a profound way.

Communication efforts helped sites make progress in changing the public conversation about poverty and CW. The West Virginia team, for example, noted that fostering this mindset shift was a key outcome of their engagement in the FAST-LC. In response to the team’s communication campaign, partners across the TANF and CW systems began to think and speak differently about TANF’s role in CW involvement prevention efforts.

The West Virginia team noted: *“The conversation has moved beyond the department into the public (for example, legislative, provider partners, Secretary). We are talking about the need to focus on prevention rather than removal. The Secretary wants press releases and the word out there.”*

Leadership Buy-in Is Essential for Prevention Partnerships to Gain and Maintain Traction



FAST-LC sites explained how leadership buy-in helped overcome silos and align partners around common goals. Sites noted that they made the most progress when they had strong participation from people in leadership roles—and especially when leadership made the FAST-LC a priority. For example, the Kentucky team mentioned that regional leadership meetings helped strengthen both

understanding and buy-in for system-wide changes, thereby increasing the FAST-LC effort’s visibility among leaders and encouraging collaboration among key partners. Similarly, the California team noted that having buy-in from state-level leadership has been a key strength in their prevention efforts and has provided the institutional support, funding, and attention needed to keep up the momentum for their prevention work.

Building Ongoing Structures for TANF and CW Collaboration Is a Key Success Factor



FAST-LC sites stated the intention to continue a regular schedule of partnership meetings to maintain relationships and make progress toward shared prevention goals. These structures can endure, even in the case of staff turnover. Arizona noted that maintaining a monthly meeting cadence is crucial for ongoing communication, alignment, and strategy adaptation, while Chippewa Cree

conveyed how regular meetings within and among departments help maintain consistent communication and progress toward prevention goals.

Focusing on One Small Goal at a Time Can Stimulate Prevention Partnership Progress

FAST-LC sites found that even when their bandwidth was stretched, they could still make progress if they broke down large, long-term goals into smaller steps. They noted that prevention efforts can be extensive, often involving multiple partners



A Pascua Yaqui tribal team member said that a key lesson learned was to *“narrow down to one goal and really focus on it to make it successful.”*

over long periods of time. When sites identified short-term milestones on the road towards attaining their long-term goals, they were able to make progress and experience regular small successes—which helped make the loftier, long-term goals feel more accessible. The Iowa team also found it helpful to break down their long-term vision into steps, starting with efforts to better understand families’ and frontline staff’s experience of the TANF and CW systems.

CONCLUSION

The states and Tribes participating in the FAST-LC spent a year determining how their TANF and CW programs could partner for prevention and mitigate family involvement in the CW system. In the course of their work, they encountered a range of emerging implementation issues and devised innovative strategies to address and resolve them. They also noted sustainability issues as they strived to build on their successes and maintain their efforts after the FAST-LC concludes. Their resourcefulness and creativity demonstrate that while TANF and CW partnering for prevention is challenging and sometimes difficult, staying attentive and focused on making it happen can generate meaningful benefits for the programs and the families and children they serve. The experiences of the FAST-LC sites suggest partnering for prevention is well worth the time and effort.

As one FAST-LC site explained, “strengthening prevention takes time, communication, collaborative relationships, and trust.”