

Focusing Efforts

Using Shared Data to Define and Advance Prevention Goals

Reflection Guide and Tip Sheet

This tool is for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program staff interested in strengthening partnerships with Child Welfare (CW) programs that promote [Purpose 1 of TANF](#) to ensure children can be cared for in their own homes. When families have unmet basic needs, such as insufficient food, housing, or childcare, they are at increased risk for involvement in the CW system¹. Partnerships between TANF and CW can help coordinate services to ensure families' material needs are met and families can stay together. This tool includes reflection questions and tips along with real-world examples of collaboration between TANF and CW programs.

Reflection Questions



Using shared data to improve services presents an exciting yet challenging opportunity for TANF programs. Partnering with CW agencies to share and apply data can support more coordinated efforts to keep families together. Use the reflection questions below to explore how your agency can build motivation and readiness to leverage shared data in advancing prevention goals.

Strategic Thinking & Mindset

Why does your program want to coordinate with your CW agency to use shared data? What problem(s) would it help you address? What would it help you achieve?

What are the potential consequences of not sharing data with your CW agency or using it?

How might acting on insights from data shared with the CW agency affect:

- Staff who provide services?
- Families that your program serves?
- Program outcomes?

How does using data shared with your CW agency align with other priorities or initiatives within your TANF program? Where are there natural opportunities for overlap?

A Video Series on TANF and Child Welfare Partnerships to Promote Purpose 1: Lessons Learned from FAST-LC



The Office of Family Assistance partnered with the Children's Bureau to develop the [Families Are Stronger Together Learning Community \(FAST-LC\)](#), which focused on preventing family involvement in the child welfare system through developing, implementing, and enhancing TANF–CW partnerships and innovations. FAST-LC was a one-year initiative that involved 10 Tribal and state TANF and CW agencies.

This reflection guide and tip sheet accompanies a video on [Focusing Efforts: Using Shared Data to Define and Advance Prevention Goals](#), which highlights lessons from the FAST-LC. The video features representatives from Oregon and Michigan who discuss how they use shared data to identify families' needs and enhance their programs to help keep families together.

Understanding Context & Readiness

To what extent does your program already use shared data to inform or meet prevention goals?

What are your leaders' and staff's skills, knowledge, and motivation to understand opportunities for using shared data? What is needed to develop their skills, knowledge, and motivation further?

What is your program's technological and data infrastructure to share data and learn from it? How might you develop it more? Who would you need to work with?

What are the biggest hurdles or gaps to address to be able to share data and act on insights from it?

¹Anderson, C. and Y. Grewal-Kök. (July 2023). [The Role of TANF in Economic Stability and Family Well-Being and Child Safety](#). Chapin Hall.



Key Insights from the Field



Sharing data across agencies can be a complicated process. Michigan and Oregon shared that like any agency-wide change, using shared data to support decision making processes requires clear goal setting, prioritization, and buy-in and collaboration from key people.



Start by asking questions. The process for sharing data can be overwhelming and intimidating. The best place to start is being curious, finding others that are also curious, and working together to find answers to your questions.



Get clear on your goals for using shared data. Shared data can serve many goals. For example, agencies can use shared data to identify key challenges that program participants face—such as the economic and concrete supports that participants might need to help avoid out-of-home placement. Or agencies might use shared data to create reports that justify requests for additional funding from legislators. Have a clear vision for what your program wants to accomplish and consider how using shared data can help advance your prevention goals.



Look for leadership buy-in and champions. For many agencies, becoming data-driven is just one priority among many priorities in the pipeline. Ensuring key leaders are on board can help prioritize your data integration or use efforts and support timely and efficient implementation.



Bring together key staff from both departments to ensure data systems communicate effectively. Integrating data systems can be a long and technical process—often involving matching data across systems to build a more comprehensive view of the characteristics and outcomes of families or individuals. Bringing together key staff who have specific expertise in the data systems can help you explore what the data possibilities are.

Michigan and Oregon Use Shared Data to Identify Families' Needs and Track Results of Program Innovations



Sharing Data across TANF and CW to Identify Families' Needs

Under the FAST-LC, the Michigan Department for Health and Human Services developed the Family Impact Teams (FIT) [project](#), which embeds TANF staff in child welfare units to help connect families to safety net resources. The overall purpose of the FIT project is to strengthen permanency rates of children in foster and congregate care, keep families together, and increase placement stability. The Michigan TANF and CW agencies developed a shared electronic referral system and FIT teams used data to provide real-time understandings of the needs of families and track economic and concrete supports FIT provided.

Designing Processes and Tools for Using Data



Through FAST-LC, the Oregon Department of Human Services worked with [Chapin Hall](#) to design a consistent [process and tool](#) for reporting on the development, tracking, and data collection of program innovations to better understand their outcomes and unintended consequences.



From Reflection to Action

How can you use these insights in your own program? Consider these questions to help you identify immediate opportunities, align action with purpose, and set the stage for meaningful progress.

- What questions do you have about using or sharing data to advance prevention goals? Who can you work with to find answers?
- Which partners and decision makers would need to be engaged early—and how?

- How can you begin conversations with key data staff in TANF or CW to share knowledge about their respective data systems?



- What communication approach would resonate with your internal teams to get them excited and engaged about sharing or using data?
- What's one low-risk idea you could make progress on within the next month? What do you need to get started?

This product was developed by BLH Technologies and Mathematica under Contract No. 75ACF122C00029 with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance.

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