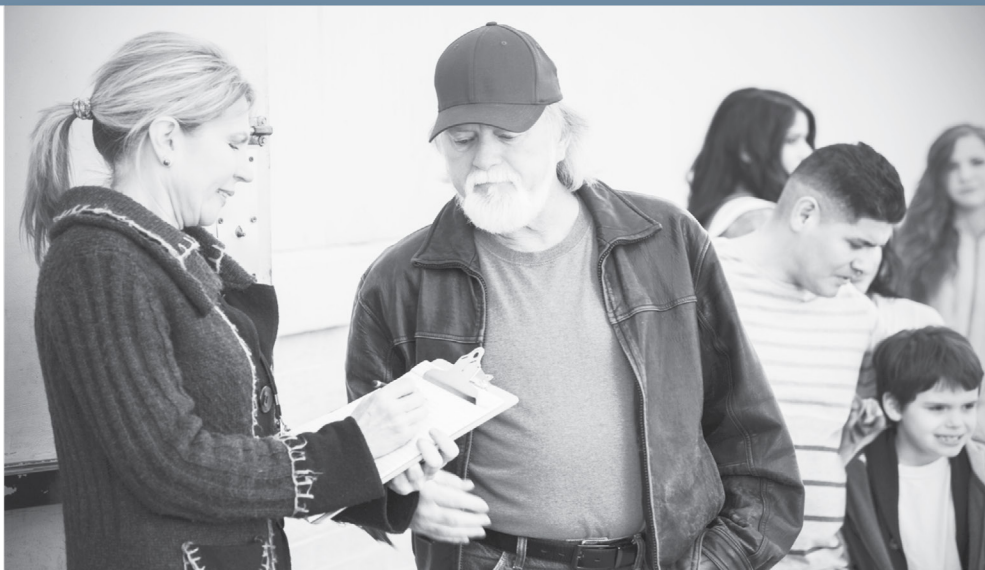




Supporting Families Experiencing Homelessness: Strategies and Approaches for TANF Agencies

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Introduction and background

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides cash assistance to low-income families, including those currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The flexibility of TANF's block grant program offers states, Tribes, and local jurisdictions wide latitude in their ability to provide an array of supports and services to people currently or at risk of experiencing homelessness. In 2013, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA), in recognition of the integral role TANF can play in family stability, released Information Memorandum ([TANF-ACF-IM-2013-01](#)) "Use of TANF Funds to Serve Homeless Families and Families at Risk of Experiencing Homelessness." That memorandum highlights the important role TANF can play in helping families experiencing homelessness, offers approaches for using TANF funding, and provides examples of existing state initiatives.

To better understand how states and localities are currently using TANF funds to support families experiencing homelessness, ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) contracted with Abt Associates and its partner MEF Associates to conduct the study. This brief summarizes the study's findings for each of its primary research questions.

Primary research questions

The study's three primary research questions are:

1. To what extent are TANF agencies across the country using TANF funds to serve and support families experiencing or at risk of homelessness?
2. What approaches and strategies are TANF agencies using to serve these families?
3. What do those findings mean for TANF policymakers and Continuum of Care leaders trying to address family homelessness?

Methods

To better understand state TANF agencies' policies toward addressing family homelessness and the extent to which local TANF programs are implementing these policies, the study team conducted a scan of TANF agency practices in 2018 and 2019. The scan had two components. First, the study team conducted a systematic document review of 25 state TANF plans and an online survey of all U.S. state and territory TANF administrators and a sample of three regional or county TANF administrators in each state.

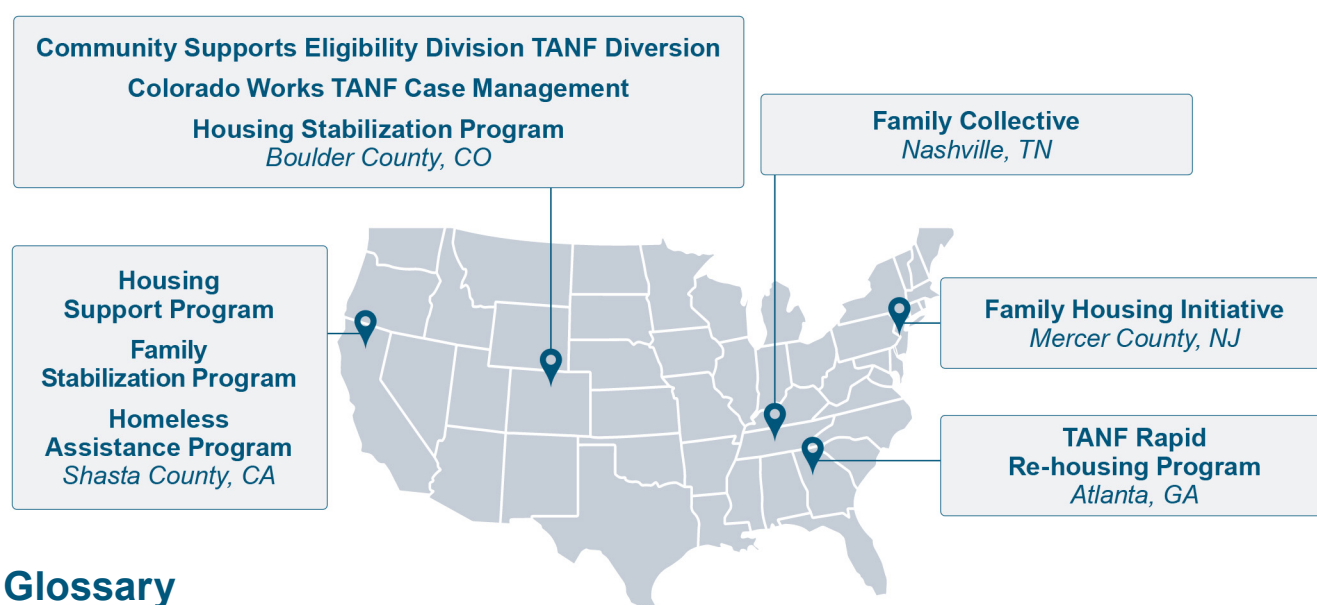
Key Findings and Implications

- Local TANF agencies often focus on helping families experiencing homelessness in response to state policy guidance.
- TANF agencies should consider tradeoffs between operating a housing assistance program and providing funding to local organizations with more expertise.
- Local homeless service providers, Continuums of Care, and Public Housing Agencies are key partners in the effective implementation of programs that TANF funds to serve families experiencing homelessness.
- TANF agencies should consider fully integrating employment services and job training with any housing assistance funded by TANF. More consideration for how these housing-focused programs can benefit from existing TANF resources may help strengthen and streamline case management efforts.
- TANF agencies should consider braiding their funding with other public and private funding streams to amplify its ability to help families experiencing homelessness.
- Continuums of Care should explore accessing TANF funds that offer the flexibility to support other services such as child care and transportation services that often cannot be funded by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development programs.
- Continuums of Care can offer expertise on supporting families experiencing homelessness by providing knowledge and training to TANF staff.

Then the study team examined sites in five communities to gain in-depth information about how TANF programs use TANF and maintenance-of-effort funds to help families experiencing or at risk of homelessness (see Exhibit 1). In November 2018, the study team conducted an in-person pilot site visit to the Family Housing Initiative (FHI) in Mercer County, New Jersey. In September and October 2020, the study team virtually visited four additional sites: Community Supports Eligibility Division TANF Diversion, Colorado Works TANF Case Management, and the Housing Stabilization Program initiatives in Boulder County, Colorado; The Family Collective in Nashville, Tennessee; the TANF Rapid Re-housing (TANF RRH) Program in Atlanta, Georgia; and the Housing Support Program (HSP), the Family Stabilization Program (FaSt), and the Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) in Shasta County, California.

Appendix A provides a more detailed discussion of the study's methodology.

Exhibit 1: Programs and sites visited by the study team



Glossary

Key Term	Definition
Continuums of Care (CoCs)	A CoC is a regional/state/local community planning body that coordinates housing, services, and funding for families and individuals experiencing homelessness within a specific geographic area. The CoC assesses and prioritizes individuals and families for housing and/or services to help them move into transitional and permanent housing, with the goal of long-term stability.
Public Housing Agency (PHA)	A PHA is a local organization that manages federal housing assistance programs, including public housing developments and the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. PHAs often coordinate with the local CoC; and in some cases, PHAs create general and limited preferences to target housing assistance toward people experiencing homelessness.
Rapid re-housing (RRH) programs	RRH programs provide short-term rental assistance and case management to individuals and families experiencing homelessness so they can quickly move to permanent housing.

Fewer than half of states use their TANF funds to help families currently or at risk of experiencing homelessness gain stable housing

According to the results of the study's survey of TANF administrators conducted in 2019, fewer than half (43 percent) of TANF administrators designate TANF funds to provide services related to housing families experiencing homelessness. About 28 percent of administrators reserve housing-related cash assistance only for families experiencing homelessness. Reflecting the broad discretion of states to determine the assistance they provide through TANF, no uniform process exists by which states identify families experiencing or at risk of homelessness, nor is there a standard set of available services or benefits.

States use a variety of methods to identify and serve families experiencing or at risk of homelessness

The online survey of TANF administrators included questions about states' definitions of homelessness. A majority of TANF administrators report that they use one of the two circumstances included in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) definition of literal homelessness¹ in their definition: living on the street or in a place not meant for human habitation" (93 percent) and "living in an emergency shelter or transitional housing" (82 percent). Almost two-thirds of administrators (62 percent) also include "people living in an unstable housing situation" in their definitions of homelessness, and almost half of administrators (49 percent) include "people living doubled-up with friends and relatives."

Almost all TANF agencies identify families experiencing homelessness either as part of the TANF application process or by relying on an outside source to identify the housing status of TANF participants. For those that use that TANF application process, they may provide a checkbox to indicate homelessness or ask about applicants' living situations during intake. Other states expect applicants to self-report homelessness at some point. A small number of TANF administrators report relying on an external source such as housing providers to inform that TANF agency about applicants' housing status.

Reflecting the broad flexibility of the TANF block grant, states offer a variety of approaches for helping families experiencing homelessness. Almost all state TANF administrators (96 percent) report that, after determining eligibility, they require local agencies to refer families to a partner agency or third-party service provider, and 60 percent report that local agencies coordinate with other groups to provide assistance jointly. Somewhat under half of state TANF agencies (43 percent) designate TANF funding to provide housing assistance specifically to families experiencing homelessness, while 33 percent require local TANF agencies to connect families experiencing homelessness to other agencies.

Differences between state and regional TANF administration

The type and nature of partnerships may differ depending on whether the state or county sets TANF policies. Homeless service providers typically operate on a local level, whereas TANF policies often are set by state agencies.

On the TANF administrator survey:

- 29 percent of **state TANF administrators** report their local agencies currently coordinate with local CoCs; another 22 percent intend to in the future.
- 38 percent of **regional TANF administrators** report their agency currently coordinates with its local CoC, and another 22 percent intend to in the future.

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. HEARTH Homeless Definition Final Rule: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2011-12-05/pdf/2011-30942.pdf>

States view their role as providing technical guidance, coordinating policies and service delivery, and using the flexibility offered by TANF to tailor services

Some states choose to alter their TANF program requirements for families experiencing homelessness. One-fifth (20 percent) of responding state administrators exempt families experiencing homelessness from mandated work participation requirements and four percent from TANF time limits. Sixty percent of state TANF administrators report that they provide technical guidance to local TANF case managers and other local office staff on how to help families experiencing homelessness. A small number of TANF agencies report providing direct funding to other organizations that serve this population: CoCs (11 percent), ESG programs (9 percent), the state department of housing or state housing finance agency (9 percent), or local PHAs (2 percent). About one-quarter (26 percent) of TANF administrators report that regional administrators and TANF offices can develop their own spending priorities.

The flexibility of TANF funding allows programs to provide a variety of services to families experiencing homelessness

The TANF program can provide cash assistance and supports for low-income families, including those currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Types of support can include mental health and nonmedical substance abuse treatment, as well as various employment services including education, subsidized employment, job training, and job placement. TANF agencies also can provide housing subsidies to families beyond any TANF cash benefits they would receive if not homeless.

TANF funds can fill a gap that exists in many communities' efforts to help families avoid experiencing homelessness. Unlike homeless assistance programs funded by HUD and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), TANF funds can provide rental assistance to families who are living in doubled-up situations with family members or friends or who are facing imminent eviction.

The TANF-funded homeless assistance programs in Nashville and Shasta County provide rent subsidies to families currently experiencing homelessness and those who are at risk, and Boulder County provided additional emergency rental assistance during the early stages of COVID-19 pandemic to stabilize families at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Staff from three sites (Atlanta, Nashville, and Shasta County) report that their participants experienced positive outcomes after participating in their TANF-funded programs. In Nashville, most clients remain in their new housing units a year after their housing assistance ends— a common performance benchmark for rapid re-housing programs.

- In **Nashville**, families work with community-based homeless service providers to receive housing assistance.
- In **Shasta County**, families currently receiving TANF and at risk of homelessness may receive rental assistance directly from their HSP social worker or Employment Training FaSt worker.
- In **Boulder County**, TANF funding enabled the local human services agency to quickly respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and provide rental assistance to people who had lost their employment or had reduced earnings and were struggling to afford their rent.

TANF program funds also can provide help with transportation and child care, unlike HUD homeless assistance programs, which may not provide such services directly but rather through referrals to other programs. Many families experiencing or at risk of homelessness struggle to afford child care, which can make it challenging for them to find and maintain employment, as well as to search for housing. To respond to this need, Nashville's Family Collective staff work with TANF staff to help expedite applications for child care vouchers.

TANF funding also can act as a bridge to other housing subsidies. Four of the intensively studied sites—Atlanta, Mercer County, Nashville, and Shasta County—provide temporary rental assistance while families wait for a long-term housing subsidy from the local PHA. In Nashville, at the time of our virtual site visit, the local PHA was reserving 18 vouchers per month for families experiencing homelessness. Nashville's Family Collective staff help families gather the necessary documentation to apply for an HCV and provide rental assistance until they are accepted into the program and can start using the housing voucher. Families participating in Shasta County's HSP and FaSt programs receive priority access to vouchers from the City of Redding PHA. The Shasta County PHA also offers HSP and FaSt families priority access to its HCV program.

State TANF agencies can encourage local agencies to target families experiencing homelessness for additional assistance

Programs that elect to use TANF funds specifically to support families experiencing homelessness cite several reasons for targeting their assistance to this population. In the survey of state TANF administrators and in interviews with the five sites the study team studied intensively, the factors that most frequently motivate TANF agencies to target families experiencing homelessness for additional assistance are: federal guidance; state-level policy changes; increased community need; requests from homeless service providers; and funding changes.

Federal guidance

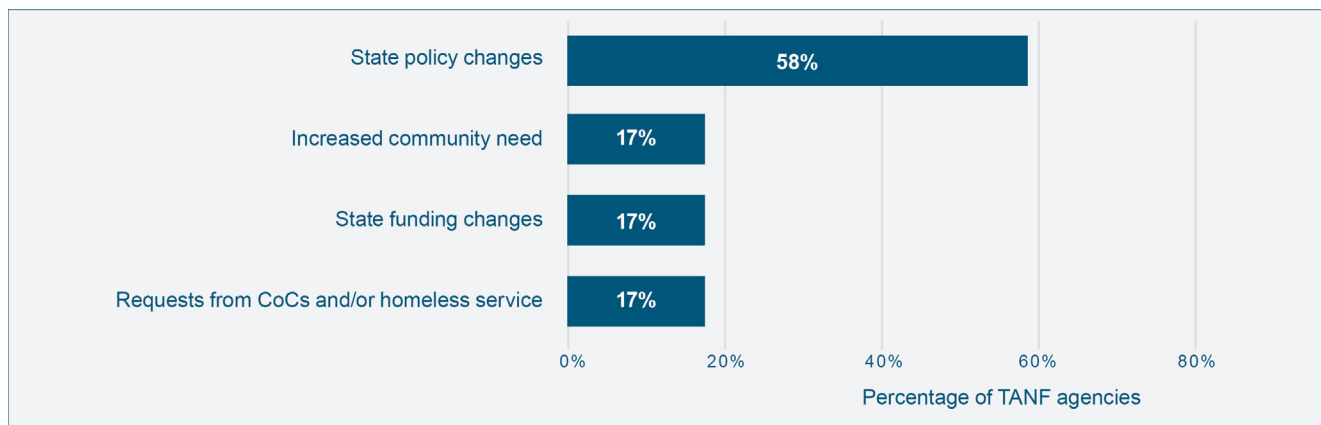
The 2013 OFA memo encourages TANF agencies to implement changes that would increase the extent to which they serve families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. In our TANF administrator survey, 26 percent of respondents report making changes since 2013 to improve the ways in which they identify and serve families experiencing homelessness, but only a small percentage (7 percent) report introducing this type of assistance directly in response to the 2013 OFA memo.

During our site visit in Atlanta, stakeholders did cite the 2013 OFA memo as one of their key motivators in seeking TANF support to design and implement the city's TANF Rapid Re-housing Program. They also reported that ACF regional staff encouraged the Atlanta CoC and Georgia's TANF agency to collaborate on the TANF rapid re-housing program. The ACF regional staff also encouraged the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, which is supported by HHS funding, to join the effort. Similarly, in Nashville, ACF regional staff prompted conversations between Tennessee's TANF agency and local non-profits interested in expanding services for families at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

State policy change or recognition of community need

The survey of regional TANF administrators asked about other motivating factors beyond the 2013 OFA memo that led to helping families experiencing homelessness with TANF funds. Exhibit 2 shows those responses.

Exhibit 2: State policy changes were the most frequent factor cited by local administrators prompting them to serve families experiencing homelessness



Source: State TANF administrator survey. N=12. Reports only state TANF administrators who indicated motivating factors beyond the 2013 OFA memo. Responses do not sum to 100% because the question allowed multiple responses.

More than half of the respondents (58 percent) report that a state policy change prompted them to improve the identification of and provision of services to families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Smaller numbers cite concerns about increasing numbers of families experiencing homelessness, state funding changes, or requests from the local CoC and/or local homeless service providers as the impetus for implementing changes.

States can encourage regional and county TANF offices to adopt policies and practices that prioritize families experiencing and at risk of homelessness for assistance. Among the five sites the study team studied intensively, stakeholders stated that increasing numbers of families experiencing homelessness spurred the use of TANF funds to assist families experiencing homelessness. For example, between 2018 and 2020, California saw an almost 25 percent increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness, from 129,972 to 161,548, and an almost 20 percent increase in the number of families experiencing homelessness, from 6,702 to 8,030 (Henry et al., 2021). California state officials recognized that TANF offered another funding stream to assist families facing housing instability and homelessness. It was to address this growing need that the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program developed the HSP and the FaSt Programs as tools that county CalWORKs offices could apply for and use to help families secure housing.

Only 17 percent of responding state administrators cite requests from the local CoC or local homeless service providers as motivating improvements in identifying and serving families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. However, in two of the sites the study team studied intensively, Atlanta and Nashville, non-profit homeless assistance providers approached their state TANF agencies and requested TANF funds to expand their existing services.

Recognition of the Housing First philosophy and prevalence of the Rapid Re-housing (RRH) program model

New policies to serve families experiencing homelessness can drive reform in TANF programs. To help families experiencing homelessness, Mercer County previously used transitional housing, a longer-

What is Housing First?

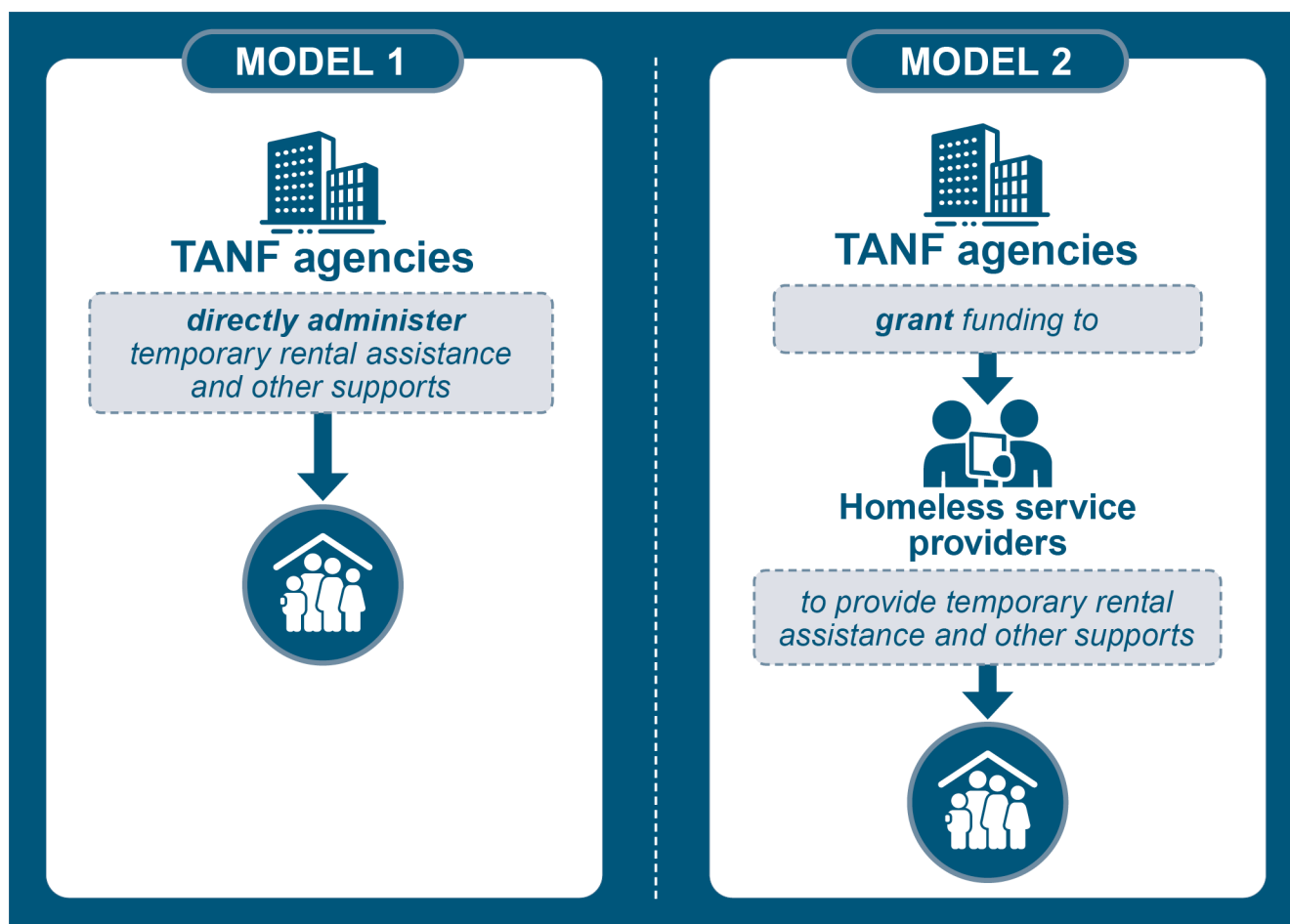
Housing First is an approach that prioritizes obtaining permanent housing when serving people experiencing homelessness. The security of permanent housing then enables the family to pursue other supports that they need to improve their quality of life.

term and service-intensive approach. County staff reported that transitional housing was very expensive and that participants often returned to homelessness. In 2007, Mercer County began shifting toward a Housing First approach—that is, providing housing assistance before expecting participants to address other needs such as finding employment and seeking treatment for mental health or substance use disorders. In 2009, the county received a HUD grant to participate in HUD’s Rapid Re-housing Demonstration for Families program. Staff report that joining the initiative “gave [us] the legs” to continue its RRH program for TANF families.

Two common models of providing TANF support to families experiencing homelessness are direct support from the TANF agency and funding other service providers

Based on the TANF administrator survey and in conversations with the five intensively studied sites, the study team identified two models communities use to provide TANF support specifically targeted to families experiencing homelessness: (1) directly administering a program or (2) funding existing service providers (see Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3: Two models for providing TANF assistance to people experiencing homelessness



Administer programs directly

In the first model, TANF agencies **directly administer** programs to provide rental assistance and other housing-related supports to families experiencing homelessness. Typically, TANF agencies use TANF funds to help families pay rent to their landlords, choosing to cover a portion or the entire rental payment for a set number of months. Agencies also may provide additional housing-related supports, including case management, housing search assistance, move-in support, and help applying for long-term housing.

In the survey of state TANF administrators, somewhat more than a third of respondents (38 percent) reported using TANF funding to provide housing assistance and related supports directly to families experiencing homelessness. That can include short-term rental assistance, move-in assistance, and security deposits. The relatively small number of agencies providing assistance directly could reflect the effort it takes to create and implement a new form of assistance, including developing new policies and procedures and training staff.

Boulder, Mercer, and Shasta Counties all provide direct support but use somewhat different models. In each case, the state TANF agency granted the local TANF agency the flexibility to design and operate its housing assistance program for people experiencing homelessness.

- In **Boulder County**, the human services agency that administers the TANF program used that flexibility to create their COVID-19 assistance program.² TANF agency staff determined that the pandemic would increase the need for short-term housing assistance and quickly repurposed TANF funds that were not being used for employment and training programs to provide emergency rental assistance. Providing housing assistance directly through the TANF program may help agencies to tailor assistance to suit their communities' needs and may help achieve a unified approach to case management across housing, cash, and employment assistance.
- **Mercer County** uses a central application for its social services, including TANF. One component of its application process is an assessment that screens for housing status. If the family is currently experiencing homelessness, the family works with a long-term social worker to identify permanent housing and to find and keep employment.
- **Shasta County** designed the FaSt program first and continues to refine the program based on trial and error. When developing HSP, the County used FaSt as a template.

Creating a housing program within a TANF agency requires staff to learn new skills and develop new processes for providing housing support. Even if the TANF agency operates a housing assistance program directly, sometimes the agency expands the program beyond TANF staff and works with local service providers to provide additional support. In Boulder and Mercer Counties, TANF staff receive training on how to provide housing assistance to participating families. In Mercer County, the TANF agency partners with a local emergency shelter to identify families experiencing homelessness. The agency created a Housing First Unit within its TANF office to work specifically with families in need of housing assistance and partners with a local homeless service provider to run the RRH component of the program.

² For more information about Boulder County's COVID response program, please see *Using TANF Funding to Provide Housing Assistance During the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

Fund an intermediary to provide assistance

In the second model, TANF agencies **provide funding** to existing homeless service providers to operate housing programs for families experiencing homelessness. This allows the service providers to expand their existing programs. Atlanta and Nashville both use this model.

In this model, the level of TANF agency involvement and assistance can vary. Homeless service providers typically have some latitude to apply their expertise in designing and implementing the programs that use TANF funding.

- Georgia's Division of Family and Children Services, the state's TANF agency, provides funding to Partners for HOME, the **Atlanta** CoC. The CoC then contracts with an Atlanta-area homeless service provider, Project Community Connections Inc. (PCCI) to implement the program. With a decade of experience implementing RRH programs, PCCI uses TANF and private funding to implement an RRH program for families experiencing homelessness. PCCI staff provide housing search assistance, move-in assistance, and housing and employment case management for up to a year.
- The Department of Human Services, Tennessee's state TANF agency, provides funding to the United Way of Greater Nashville. It in turn supports a network of 12 **Nashville**-area community service organizations known as The Family Collective to provide housing and other supports to families experiencing homelessness. Though Tennessee TANF staff helped to shape the program, they are not involved in daily program operations. They are, however, still available to help address programmatic challenges and work through any issues that arise. The Family Collective also uses TANF funds to expand its geographic reach and to serve more families experiencing homelessness.

A TANF agency can build partnerships with local housing organizations to leverage their expertise and capacity

Each community has a unique network of public agencies, non-profit service providers, and other partners that administer a range of programs for families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. By building ongoing partnerships with these organizations, TANF agencies can more effectively identify eligible families, deliver assistance, and connect families to longer-term supports if needed. Across the five sites studied intensively, the study team observed several common partnerships with local housing organizations.

Continuums of Care (CoCs)

CoCs are regional/state/local community planning body that coordinates housing, services, and funding for families and individuals experiencing homelessness within a specific geographic area. A substantial share of federal homelessness funds flow through CoCs, which are then distributed to homeless service providers based on local needs and priorities. CoCs also develop and manage a coordinated entry system. This central intake and assessment process provides a single point-of-entry for housing and other services for individuals and families needing assistance.

TANF agencies can make use of these existing eligibility and intake systems to identify families needing housing assistance. Atlanta and Nashville both rely on their local CoCs' existing coordinated entry systems for referrals to their TANF-funded housing assistance programs. Leveraging their CoCs also broadened their pool of applicants because any family who applied for housing assistance through the CoC could be eligible for the TANF program.

TANF agencies can also benefit from CoCs' expertise in serving families experiencing homelessness within the jurisdiction, especially if the agency is planning to implement its own housing assistance program. For example, in Shasta County, the local CoC provided advice and support during design and start-up of Shasta's HSP and FaSt programs. CoCs are also a valuable forum for information sharing more broadly, and TANF agencies may benefit from participating in planning meetings or service committees. For example, in Atlanta and Mercer County, staff from state and local TANF agencies participate in local CoC meetings.

Public Housing Agencies (PHAs)

PHAs are local organizations that manage federal housing assistance programs, including public housing developments and the HCV program. This program provides tenants with a subsidy that they can use to rent any eligible unit they choose. The tenant then pays 30 percent of their income toward rent. PHAs often coordinate with the local CoC; and in some cases, PHAs create general and limited preferences to target housing assistance toward people experiencing homelessness.

By partnering with PHAs, TANF agencies can help families gain access to long-term housing subsidies after their TANF housing assistance ends. This is an important approach in higher-cost housing markets, where families may not be able to afford their full rent after their TANF assistance concludes. In four of the five sites the study team visited, TANF agencies directly coordinate with the local PHA to help families transition to longer-term supports. For example:

- In **Atlanta**, its PHA, Atlanta Housing, offers a special voucher program, FLOW (Flexibility, Livability, Outcomes, Wellness), to support tenants who are transitioning from permanent supportive housing to independent living. Through a partnership with the state TANF agency, Atlanta Housing offered these vouchers to TANF RRH families who demonstrated financial responsibility with their monthly housing expense but did not meet their monthly rent obligation after a year of rental assistance.
- In **Nashville**, the Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency sets aside a portion of its HCVs for families experiencing homelessness. Family Collective case managers help participating families gather the necessary documentation and apply for a voucher as they approach the end of their TANF assistance period.
- The **Shasta County** Health and Human Services Agency is a Qualified Referral Agency for the Redding PHA. HSP and FaSt clients who need long-term rental assistance are referred to the PHA, and these clients receive priority for an HCV. In addition, the Shasta County Housing Authority offers HSP and FaSt clients priority access to its tenant-based rental assistance program.

Local homeless service providers

Local homeless service providers manage and deliver federal and local homeless assistance programs and provide emergency shelter, rapid re-

TANF-PHA Coordination

- Over two-fifths (42 percent) of respondents to the TANF administrator survey reported their regional or county TANF programs are working with the local PHAs; another 29 percent say they intend to work together in the future.
- More than half of respondents (53 percent) to the TANF administrator survey reported their regional programs working with local homeless service providers to assist families experiencing homelessness. Another 37 percent say they intend to work with them in the future.

housing, transitional, and supportive housing to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Homeless providers may receive funds through their local CoC or through other state or local sources.

Local homeless service providers have extensive on-the-ground experience connecting families experiencing homelessness with housing and supportive services. They often have a deep knowledge of the local rental market and have established relationships with landlords willing to accept rental assistance. By working closely with local providers, TANF agencies can benefit from their expertise and experience.³

TANF funds can be used to support or expand existing RRH programs. In Atlanta and Nashville, TANF-funded RRH programs are managed by an experienced local homelessness service provider. Using their existing capacity and expertise, these providers were able to quickly implement programs, and use their relationships with local landlords to find housing options for participating families.

Even if TANF agencies are implementing their own housing programs, local homeless service providers can offer valuable insight into program design and support effective program delivery. For example, in Mercer County, FHI program staff worked closely with staff from a local shelter to ensure that families were receiving appropriate services. The shelter refers eligible families to the initiative, and staff from both programs participate in a biweekly case conference meeting to discuss any potential gaps in services for eligible families.

Leveraging the expertise and existing relationships of local homeless service providers

Rapid re-housing programs operated by local homeless service providers typically build relationships with a network of landlords who are willing to accept families using RRH assistance.

Partnership challenges

TANF agencies can benefit from the knowledge of external partners, but some study sites experience challenges in aligning TANF-funded programs with other services offered to eligible families. In some cases, TANF administrators and external partners may need to navigate contradictory or incongruous program eligibility requirements. For example, programs may target families at different income levels or poverty thresholds or TANF agencies may define homelessness differently than homeless service providers do. There also may be tension between differing program goals and priorities. For example, TANF's approach emphasizes economic self-sufficiency, so job training and employment services are a central component of the program. However, many local homeless service providers have adopted a Housing First model, which focuses on re-housing families without first requiring them to participate in employment, health, or educational activities.

Several sites also reported, at times, it can be challenging to coordinate decision-making across different organizations. Sites also discussed the risk of having case managers from different programs duplicate efforts or provide families with conflicting information. For this reason, it is important for all partners to establish clear roles and decision-making processes.

³ The brief [Approaches to Assisting People Experiencing Homelessness with TANF Funds](#) provides more information about homeless service providers and their partnerships with TANF agencies.

TANF funding can support temporary rental assistance as well as other housing and non-housing-related supports

TANF agencies use two approaches to fund and provide temporary rental assistance: (1) fixed, short-term rental assistance; and (2) tapered rental assistance:

Fixed, short-term rental assistance

Using this approach, TANF agencies use TANF funds to help families bridge the gap until they qualify for a long-term housing subsidy or increase their earnings through employment. TANF agencies make cash payments directly to families or to their landlords for a set number of months. Agencies use their discretion to cover a portion or the entire rental payment.

Both Boulder and Mercer Counties provide fixed, short-term rental assistance. During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Boulder County paid 100 percent of the rent for families at risk of homelessness for up to three months using TANF funding. Though TANF agencies could choose to directly pay landlords, Boulder County loaded the funds designated for rental assistance onto families' Electronic Benefit Transfer cards. In Mercer County, the local TANF agency covers 70 percent of families' rents for up to one year, paying rent directly to families' landlords. The agency uses that year to help families find employment and develop connections to community resources related to housing and other programs that contribute to continued family stability. Because the subsidy does not cover 100 percent of the rent, the TANF agency refers to this as "defined contribution" rental assistance.

Tapered rental assistance

Using the tapered rental assistance approach, TANF agencies may provide a varying amount of aid. TANF agencies start paying up to 100 percent of a family's rent for a set number of months, and then gradually decrease the subsidy over a specified period. For example, in Shasta County, the local TANF agency structures its rental assistance based on HUD guidelines that recommend families assume a portion of their rents. Families in the HSP program begin by paying 30 percent of their monthly income, and then gradually increase their contribution over the next six months. In Nashville, one provider requires that families initially contribute \$200 to rent, increasing their share by \$200 each month until they cover the full amount.

Additional supportive services

Beyond rental assistance, TANF funding often uses an RRH approach to provide additional supportive services to families. Services include housing and non-housing-related supports:

- **Housing-related support services** that can be funded with TANF resources include housing search assistance, application assistance, rental arrears, utility assistance, and move-in assistance.

Housing search assistance is dependent on a household's housing history, including criminal and credit history, and any past evictions. Atlanta, Mercer County, Nashville, and Shasta County all offer housing search assistance as part of their programs. In Nashville, families can choose to work with a financial counselor to understand how to build their credit. The financial counselor also usually pulls a family's credit reports to determine whether debt is a barrier to housing. Landlords may be hesitant to lease a unit to a family with rental assistance, fearing they may be challenging tenants, or they may not be able to afford their rent after the assistance ends. To help develop housing options, rapid re-housing programs operated by local homeless service providers typically build relationships with a network of landlords willing to accept families using RRH assistance.

Once a family identifies a new unit, Atlanta, Mercer County, Nashville, and Shasta County all help families with housing applications, security deposits, and moving expenses. Mercer County, Nashville, and Shasta County also provide utility assistance and pay rental arrears.

- **Non-housing-related supports** typically aim to overcome barriers to help families remain housed. Services offered through TANF-funded programs include child care assistance, behavioral and physical health services, non-housing-focused financial counseling, employment-related transportation assistance, and referrals to other community support services including for domestic violence.

TANF resources can support broader case management to help families achieve continued housing stability

TANF funding often supports expanded case management, where program staff assist families experiencing homelessness beyond employment services. Case management services vary depending on whether a TANF agency provides housing assistance directly. In programs directly run by TANF agencies, TANF staff provide case management for participants. In TANF-funded programs operated by homeless service providers, provider staff fill the case management role. All five sites provide case management services to families experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

In all sites, case managers begin working with participants during the TANF intake and assessment process, continue by helping to set goals, and then identifying steps and providing support to achieve those goals. Case managers regularly meet with participants (ranging from weekly to monthly), helping them to search for housing and complete applications, and continue to support them for a period of time after they are housed. Typically, case managers identify and work to alleviate barriers to families' obtaining and maintaining housing, which may include coordinating services with team members within their organization or making referrals to additional community organizations. In Nashville, for example, a case manager is a family's main point of contact. If a case manager refers a family to see another team member for employment or financial support, the case manager communicates with that team member to coordinate those services.

Because case managers work with families experiencing homelessness, support services can include housing search and placement assistance. To be effective, case managers need expertise in those areas, an additional skill set for TANF staff:

- **Mercer** and **Shasta Counties** developed this expertise by partnering with and receiving training from local housing organizations.
- In **Atlanta** and **Nashville**, case managers and dedicated housing specialists develop ongoing relationships with landlords and assist participants in searching for housing and applying for HCVs from the local PHA.

Some of the five sites require regular case management meetings. However, they report sessions often taper off once families enter housing and/or secure employment. In Mercer County, case managers provide intensive housing-focused case management until families secure housing, at which point the case manager may meet with families less frequently and the focus shifts to finding employment. In recognition of the level of effort necessary for intensive support, managers at the programs the study team visited report that they try to keep caseloads small, as they recognize that some families need more support and frequent check-ins.

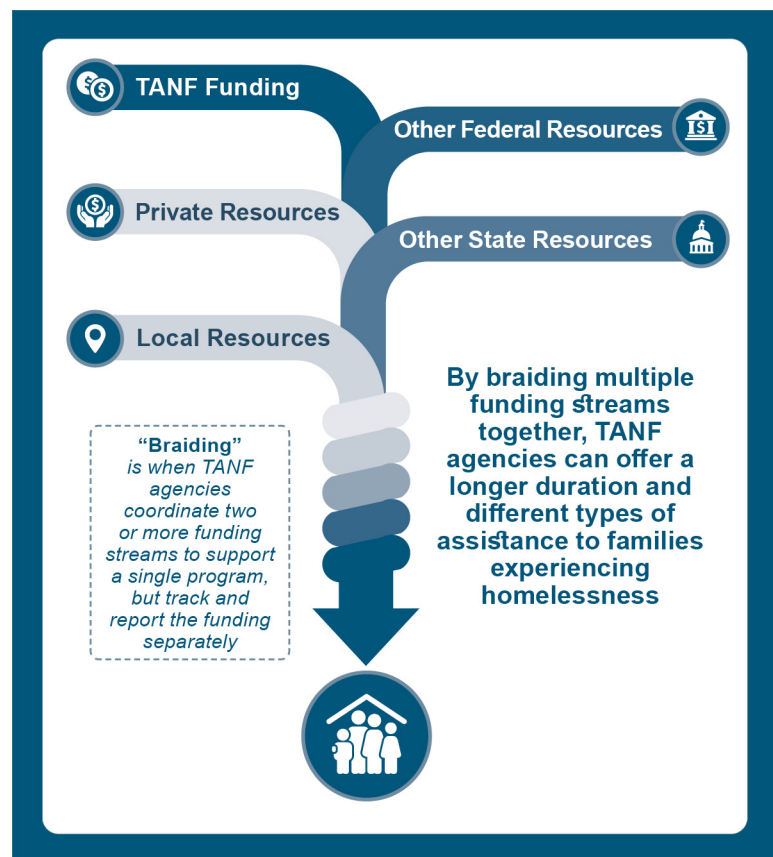
Some staff may need or want more connection to existing TANF employment programs, especially staff in homeless provider programs. In Atlanta, program staff report that they would welcome more emphasis on employment training and collaboration with TANF employment staff. The TANF RRH program in Atlanta has its own employment specialist that assists participants in conducting job searches and applying for jobs, but the specialist does not work closely to coordinate this effort with TANF employment case managers. Similarly, in Nashville, a dedicated staff member from United Way or Safe Haven helps participants identify their education and employment goals and then find and maintain jobs, but this staff member does not coordinate with TANF agency staff.

Sites braid TANF funding with other funding sources to assist families experiencing homelessness

Several of the sites the study team visited combine other federal, state, local, and private resources with TANF funding to help families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. By braiding multiple funding streams, TANF agencies can offer a longer duration of assistance to families experiencing homelessness.⁴ By combining funding streams, families can receive different types of assistance to help them access and maintain housing (see Exhibit 4). Some of these services may have been challenging for families experiencing homelessness to access independently.

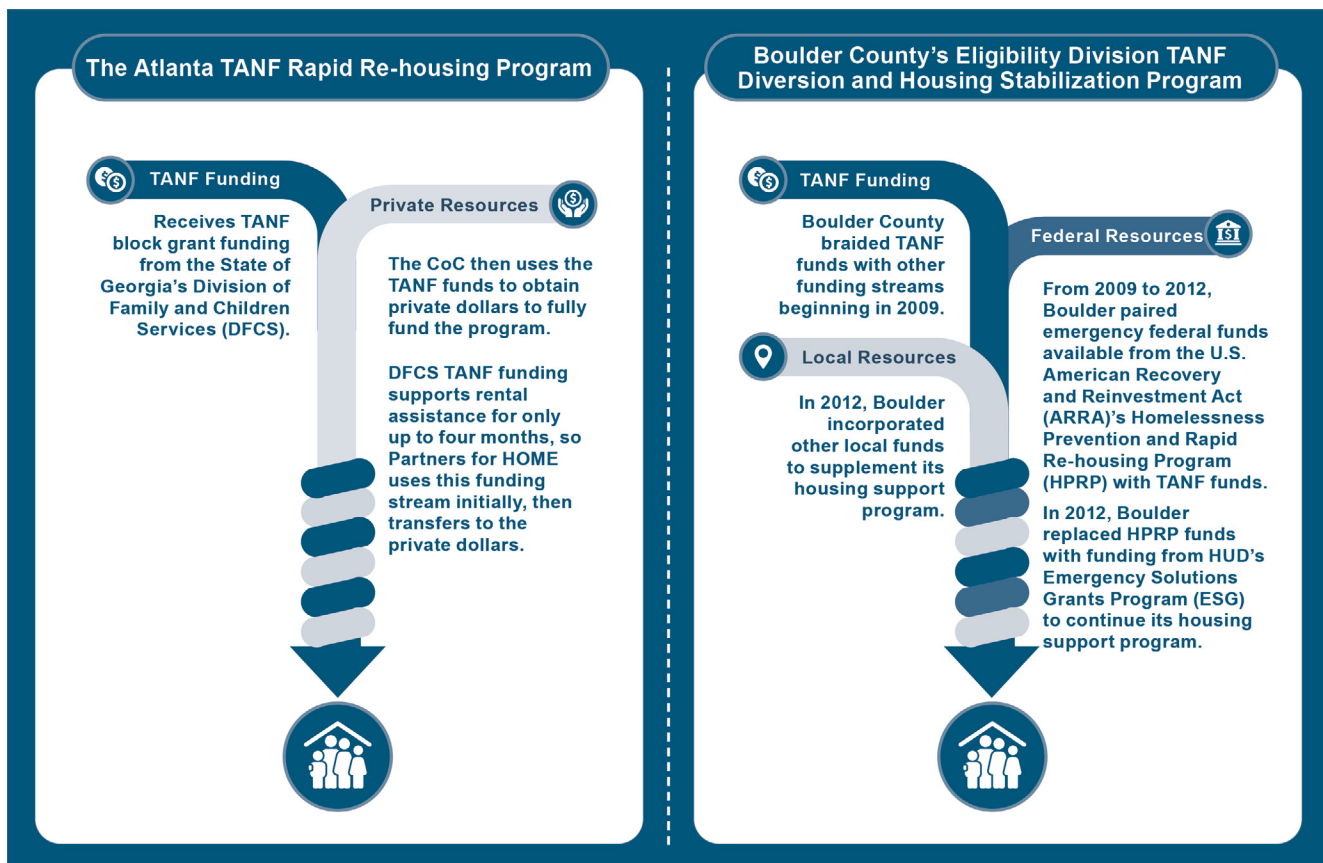
For example, in Georgia, families receive housing assistance through the TANF program for up to four months. By combining TANF funding with private funding, the TANF RRH program in Atlanta offers up to a year of rental assistance to participating families (see Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 4: Braiding funding streams together can expand the amount and types of support offered



⁴ Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care. Layering or Blending and Braiding Multiple Funding Streams. Accessed at: <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/systemsbuilding/systems-guides/financing-strategically/maximizing-impact-public-funding/blending>

Exhibit 5: Braiding resources in Atlanta's TANF RRH program and Boulder County's Eligibility Division TANF Diversion and Housing Stabilization Program



Considerations for TANF Administrators and CoC Leadership

TANF agencies can provide various forms of temporary rental assistance to families experiencing homelessness. When considering whether to support families experiencing homelessness with TANF funding, TANF policymakers should consider the following factors:

- **Tradeoffs between operating a housing assistance program internally or providing funding to local organizations with expertise in serving families experiencing homelessness such as CoCs, PHAs, or local homeless service providers.** The RRH model offers an approach of providing short-term rental assistance to families, as well as housing-related and other support services that can help families achieve and maintain housing stability.
- **Coordination of core TANF employment activities with housing assistance activities.** TANF agencies providing housing services can meet the broader service needs of low-income families experiencing homelessness by fully integrating employment services and job training. More consideration for how these housing-focused programs can benefit from existing TANF resources may help strengthen the overall case management of participating families as well as avoid duplication of efforts.
- **Maximize impact of TANF resources.** TANF agencies should consider braiding TANF funds with other funding sources, including other government funding or private funding, as it can increase the amount and duration of assistance per family. It also can increase the number of families who can be assisted with TANF resources.

Explore partnerships with local CoCs. CoCs can offer their expertise on supporting families experiencing homelessness to TANF staff. CoC leadership should explore accessing TANF funds to expand their existing provision of housing assistance and supportive services to families experiencing homelessness. TANF funds offer an additional funding source and can be used to provide critical services such as child care and transportation. CoC leadership should also consider how TANF funds can be used to bridge families to other long-term housing supports.

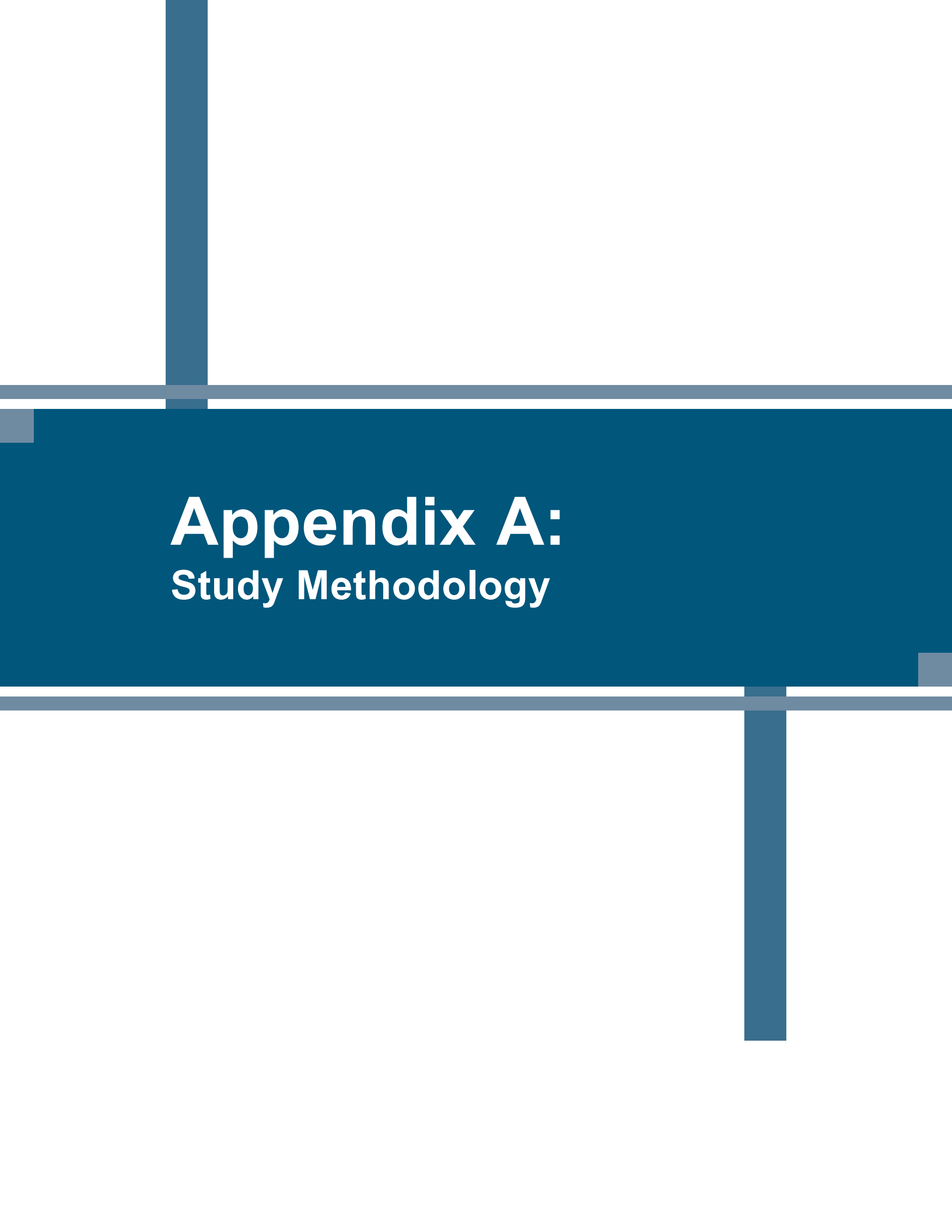
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Appendix A:

Study Methodology

Appendix A: Study Methodology

The *How TANF Agencies Support Families Experiencing Homelessness* study consisted of two components – a scan of current TANF agency practices, and site visits to five communities using TANF funds to assist families experiencing homelessness.

TANF Agency Scan

Document review

In spring 2018, the study team conducted a review of HHS-provided state and territory TANF plans and publicly available policy documents of 25 jurisdictions.⁵ The study team selected the 25 states by (1) gathering recommendations from OPRE and OFA staff; (2) reviewing data from the 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to identify the 10 states with the highest number of families experiencing homelessness, and the four states with the lowest number of families experiencing homelessness; and (3) choosing states to ensure geographic diversity and variation in population size.

The study team completed a thorough online search to identify all relevant, available state policy documents. The study team then used a data extraction form to systematically catalog information on all programs listed in state/territory TANF plans that addressed family homelessness. Finally, the study team used NVivo software to analyze the data for each state or territory.

TANF administrator survey

In summer 2019, the study team administered an online survey to all state/territory TANF administrators and to a sample of county/regional TANF administrators.

The study team selected three counties from each state based on a county's level of urbanicity, homeless population, and geographic location. In each state, the study team selected the two counties, usually one urban and one suburban, with the largest number of families experiencing homelessness based on the 2018 Point-in-Time count. The study team also selected a rural county in each state. When feasible, the study team included counties from different geographic areas of the state.

HHS provided contact information for the 54 state/territory TANF program directors. The study team identified the appropriate contacts at the state/territory and county/region levels by working with OFA Regional Program Managers, state TANF agency contacts, and by searching the state/territory and county TANF websites.

The study team administered the survey online between June and August 2019. To encourage participation, the study team sent multiple reminders: up to six by email and up to three by phone. The study team achieved a response rate of 83 percent on the state/territory survey and 51 percent on the county/regional survey.

Site visits

The study team identified candidate sites for visits by soliciting OFA Regional Program Managers and experts knowledgeable about TANF and homeless assistance programs. The TANF administrator survey also asked

⁵ The selected states were: California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, the District of Columbia, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

administrators to identify potential sites. The study team conducted preliminary interviews in summer 2018 with several programs. In consultation with OPRE and OFA staff, the study team selected five for site visits.

In fall 2018, the study team conducted a pilot site visit to the (1) Family Housing Initiative in Mercer County, New Jersey.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the other four site visits in fall 2020 were virtual: (2) the Diversion and Rental Assistance Programs in Boulder County, Colorado; (3) The Family Collective in Nashville, Tennessee; (4) the Housing Support Program (HSP), the Family Stabilization Program (FaSt), and the Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) in Shasta County, California; and (5) the TANF Rapid Re-housing Program (TANF RRH) in Atlanta, Georgia.

During each site visit, the study team interviewed staff at programs providing assistance to families experiencing homelessness, as well as their partner organizations, staff from the local CoC, and local PHAs at some sites. In most sites, the study team interviewed program supervisors and directors, as well as case managers and state TANF staff. The one-hour interviews used a semi-structured interview guide and a member of the Abt team served as notetaker.



Appendix B:

Site Profiles

TANF Rapid Re-Housing Program – Atlanta, Georgia

Site Characteristics	
Lead agency	Project Community Connections, Inc. (PCCI)
Population served	Families currently experiencing homelessness
Amount of TANF funding for homelessness programs	FY 18-19: \$375,000 FY 20-21: \$500,000
City population	506,811
Median household income	\$59,948
Median gross rent as percentage of household income	23%
Percentage below poverty level	20.8%
Unemployment rate	6.4%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2019; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019); Interviews with PCCI staff

Model description

Project Community Connections, Inc. (PCCI) uses a combination of state-administered TANF block grant funds and private funding to operate the TANF Rapid Re-housing (RRH) Program, which offers housing search and move-in assistance, rental and utility assistance, employment services, child care assistance, and ongoing case management to Atlanta families currently experiencing homelessness.

- **Rental assistance:** Cover 100 percent of rent for six months, then provide rental assistance using a progressive engagement approach for up to one year of total assistance.
- **Housing search assistance:** Identify and inspect affordable housing units for families, develop and use relationships with landlords, pay application fees and/or security deposit. Refer families who need additional rental assistance and who have consistently contributed to their housing expenses after six months to Atlanta Housing, the city's PHA, for a long-term housing subsidy.
- **Move-in assistance:** Refer families to furniture bank, assist families moving their personal possessions, help families set up utilities.
- **Case management:** Provide individualized case management depending on families' individual service plans. Can include assistance with and referrals to housing support, rental assistance, employment services, budgeting, and child care assistance.
- **Employment support services:** Identify and work to remove barriers to employment; administer skill and interest assessments; provide job search assistance application support, and job training workshops.
- **Behavioral and/or physical health services:** Refer families to mental and physical health providers. Also refer to domestic violence shelter and service provider if necessary.
- **Child care assistance:** Partner with state child care agency so families experiencing homelessness have prioritized access to child care. Case managers assist families in identifying and securing child care and after school care.

Model origins

The TANF RRH model is the result of regional TANF collaboration. In early 2017, HHS' ACF Region 4 and Georgia's Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) leadership sought new ways to reduce the number of families involved in the child welfare system after data indicated a major reason for child welfare involvement was housing stability. Region 4 and DCFS administrators recognized TANF funds could be used to provide housing and case management to help prevent families from entering the child welfare system. Regional ACF staff also recognized that applying the expertise and existing relationships of current homeless service providers would be more efficient than DCFS creating its own housing program. Region 4 staff suggested DFCS fund Partners for HOME, Atlanta's lead Continuum of Care (CoC) agency, to operate a pilot RRH program. Partners for HOME contracted with PCCI to implement the program. Region 4 also facilitated connections between PCCI and Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), solidifying the program's ability to connect families to assistance with child care.

Key agencies

- **Partners for HOME:** Atlanta's CoC lead agency; provides private dollars to supplement TANF funding.
- **Division of Family and Children Services:** Partially funds and oversees the TANF RRH program. Conducts audits of Partners for HOME and PCCI to assess eligibility compliance and estimate the services provided. Also trains and collaborates with PCCI case managers.
- **Department of Early Care and Learning:** Responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. Operates the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, which provides families with scholarships for an individual child at a specific child care provider location. DECAL provides expedited CAPS assistance or child care support to PCCI families.
- **United Way of Greater Atlanta:** Provides case management and services for TANF RRH families fleeing domestic violence or who have previously experienced domestic violence.

Diversion and Rental Assistance Programs – Boulder County, CO

Site Characteristics	
Lead agency	Boulder County Department of Housing and Human Services
Population served	Families at risk of homelessness
Amount of TANF funding for homelessness programs	Diversion: \$600,000 Emergency Rental Assistance: \$250,000 (April-Sept. 2020)
County population	326,196
Median household income	\$83,019
Median gross rent as percentage of household income	21.6%
Percentage below poverty level	10.7%
Unemployment rate	4.2%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2019; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019); Interviews with Boulder County Department of Housing and Human Services staff

Model description

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Boulder County Department of Housing and Human Services (DHHS) repurposed unused welfare-to-work TANF funding to create two new rental assistance programs: TANF diversion through time-limited rental assistance; and time-limited rental assistance and case management for existing TANF recipients.

- **Rental assistance:** Paid 100 percent of rent for up to three months, up to a cap of \$10,000.
- **Rental arrears:** Paid rental arrears as necessary to prevent evictions.

- **Case management:** Contacted families currently receiving TANF to identify additional support needed because of the **pandemic**.
- **Referral to other assistance:** Created and operated a helpline, a central phone number county residents could call to request assistance. DHHS staff operating the helpline referred families to supportive services as necessary. This included emergency shelter, job search and job skills training, financial assistance, utility assistance, eviction prevention services, the central application for all DHHS benefits (TANF diversion assistance, regular TANF, food assistance, other housing assistance programs, etc.), and more.

Model origins

DHHS was well-equipped to provide TANF-funded emergency rental assistance during the pandemic. In past years, DHHS used TANF to fund housing assistance. In 2009, Boulder County merged its public housing authority and social services department into a single agency. Program leadership worked to unify staff from the previously separate agencies and promote a culture of providing comprehensive, unified social services across teams within DHHS. It also has experience pivoting its service delivery to meet emergent needs resulting from community emergencies. After natural disasters in 2010 and 2013, DHHS set up local hubs where people could connect with emergency assistance. Staff reported that these coordinated efforts prepared them to quickly develop new programs responsive to the effects of the pandemic for low-income residents.

Key agencies

- **Department of Housing and Human Services:** Administers Boulder County's public support and housing programs, including food, health insurance, child care, and transportation assistance. DHHS created, funds, and operates the diversion and rental assistance programs.
- **Family Resource Centers (FRCs):** Local social service hubs organized by county ZIP code that are tailored to meet the specific needs of children and families in the community. They provide food, job skills training, and financial assistance, and sometimes furniture and case management. DHHS began referring people looking for housing and rental assistance to FRCs after they received an influx of federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding.

Family Housing Initiative – Mercer County, NJ

Site Characteristics	
Lead agency	Mercer County Board of Social Services (MCBOSS)
Population served	Families currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness
Amount of TANF funding for homelessness programs	–
County population	367,430
Median household income	\$81,057
Median gross rent as percentage of household income	18.74%
Percentage below poverty level	11.9%
Unemployment rate	6.1%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2019; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019); interviews with Mercer County Board of Social Services staff

Note: Amount of TANF funding for homelessness programs not available at time of site visit

Model description

The Family Housing Initiative (FHI) focuses on rapid re-housing, (i.e., quickly moving families into permanent housing before providing other services). With the goal of providing families with short-term rental assistance and case management, the FHI assists in identifying and addressing barriers to achieving self-sufficiency and provides additional services as needed.

- **Rental assistance:** Pays up to 70 percent of rent for up to 12 months.
- **Housing search assistance:** Serves as landlord liaison, inspects apartment, recommends a sustainable rental cost range; can pay security deposit.
- **Move-in assistance:** Offers families funds for furnishings, household necessities, and moving expenses.
- **Rental arrears:** Provides funding for rental arrears.
- **Utility assistance:** Provides funding.
- **Case management:** Delivers housing-focused case management upon program entry; shifts to employment-focused support after families are housed.
- **Employment support services:** Identifies and works to remove barriers to employment; administers skill and interest assessments; provides job search assistance, application support, and job training workshops.
- **Behavioral and/or physical health services:** Offers substance use disorder, mental health, and family abuse services; and counseling services when needed.
- **Child care assistance:** Offers tutoring for children. Child care assistance available through the New Jersey TANF program; recipient can be subsidized for two years after leaving TANF, if they continue to work.

Model origins

Prior to the implementation of FHI, Mercer County provided housing assistance in the form of transitional housing. Staff reported, however, that transitional housing was “incredibly expensive” and ineffective in the long term that “after transitional housing, people would often return to homelessness.” In 2007, Mercer County shifted toward a Housing First philosophy and began operating a program that provides vouchers to individuals with mental health issues experiencing homelessness. In 2009, the City of Trenton was awarded a grant to participate in HUD’s Rapid Re-housing Demonstration for Families program. This early program grew into a rapid re-housing program for TANF families.

Key agencies

- **HomeFront Shelter:** Provides emergency shelter and family preservation services to referred FHI families. HomeFront assigns a case manager who coordinates with FHI’s case manager. This coordination ensures consistency across all providers and addresses any gaps in services.
- **WorkFirst New Jersey (WFNJ) One-Stop Center:** Provides employment services and weekly case management to FHI participants who receive TANF. WFNJ case managers also work with FHI’s case manager.
- **New Jersey State Division of Family Development (DFD):** Reviews and certifies FHI eligibility determinations as part of its role providing compliance oversight and approval for emergency assistance for TANF. DFD also works with each county to ensure that communities across the state are administering TANF benefits and services according to federal and state guidelines.

The Family Collective Program – Nashville, TN

Site Characteristics	
Lead agency	United Way of Greater Nashville
Population served	Families currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness
Amount of TANF funding for homelessness programs	FY 19: \$703,500 FYr 20: \$938,000 FY 21: \$234,500
County population	670,820
Median household income	\$59,828
Median gross rent as percentage of household income	22.1%
Percentage below poverty level	15.1%
Unemployment rate	4.1%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2019; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019); staff presentation at Tennessee Conference on Social Welfare

Note: Data is for Davidson County, Tennessee

Model description

United Way of Greater Nashville formed and manages The Family Collective, a network of community-based organizations that provide housing services to families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Its Housing Support program assists families experiencing or at risk of homelessness with housing and additional supportive services. Its Employment Coaching program supports families to increase economic assets, set career goals, and develop community support networks.

- **Rental assistance:** Organizations decide whether to pay 100 percent of rent for up to two months, or offer step-down plan that decreases rental assistance by \$200 each month until the participant assumes their full rent payment.
- **Housing search assistance:** Identifies affordable housing units, develops and uses relationships with landlords, pays application fees and/or security deposits, helps families apply for Housing Choice Vouchers from the Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency (which sets aside 18 vouchers per month for people experiencing homelessness).
- **Move-in assistance:** Provides mattresses, identifies affordable furniture provider; offers free moving services.
- **Rental arrears:** Pays if necessary to move a family into new housing or to prevent evictions.
- **Utility assistance:** Provides emergency assistance if necessary to prevent eviction.
- **Case management:** Offers housing-focused case management and referrals for child care assistance; behavioral, mental, and physical health services.
- **Employment support services:** Provides employment case management; job search and application support.
- **Financial counseling:** Offers tailored financial counseling, including credit improvement suggestions, budget development, and information on accessing free and safe banking
- **Transportation assistance:** Provides gas cards when necessary and available.

Model origins

The idea to use TANF dollars to fund housing support originated with Nashville-area homeless service provider staff. Program leaders approached the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS), the agency that administers the state's TANF program, about the possibility of using TANF funds to support the needs of families at risk of or experiencing homelessness. DHS reported funding the program because the request aligned well with its concurrent two-generation initiative, an effort to address intergenerational poverty by providing programs and services to meet the financial, education, health, and social needs of every family member. DHS and The Family Collective collaborated to develop the funding approach after they learned about similar initiatives in Georgia and California. The Family Collective has been receiving TANF funding since 2017.

Key agencies

- **United Way of Greater Nashville:** Grant manager that oversees The Family Collective and reports results to DHS. Relies on 12 Nashville-area service partners to provide program services.
- **Safe Haven Family Shelter and Catholic Charities of Tennessee:** Direct service providers that operate the housing search and placement process, provide rental assistance and housing-focused case management, and refer families to other supportive services.
- **Mid-Cumberland Workforce Services:** Provides The Family Collective participants with an employment navigator to help set and obtain employment goals.
- **Department of Human Services:** Funding provider that reviews The Family Collective's performance to ensure services align with DHS and TANF priorities.

Housing Support, Homeless Assistance & Family Stabilization Programs – Shasta County, CA

Site Characteristics	
Lead agency	Shasta County Health and Human Services Agency
Population served	Families currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness
Amount of TANF funding for homelessness programs	FY 20: HSP - \$929,840 FY 20: FaSt - \$438,795
County population	180,080
Median household income	\$54,667
Median gross rent as percentage of household income	22.8%
Percentage below poverty level	13.3%
Unemployment rate	5.5%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2019; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019); interviews with Shasta County Health and Human Services Agency staff

Model description

Shasta County's Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) operates California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs), which offers three programs to families currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The Housing Support Program (HSP) provides once-in-a-lifetime rental assistance, utility assistance, and additional supportive services for 9-12 months to families experiencing homelessness or facing a court-ordered eviction and owing no more than two months back rent. The Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) funds immediate transitional housing or temporary housing for a period of 16 days once a year. The Family Stabilization Program (FaSt) helps families resolve barriers to stability while the head of household participates in CalWORKs welfare-to-work activities.

- **Rental assistance:** Requires families to contribute 30 percent of their monthly income to rent for three months, then HHSA assesses for a six-month step-down plan.
- **Housing search assistance:** Staff identify and tour affordable housing units with families, develop and use relationships with landlords, and pay application fees and/or security deposit.

- **Move-in assistance:** Provides beds, sheets, towels, cleaning supplies, and/or kitchenware depending on families' needs.
- **Rental arrears:** Pays up to two months or \$3,000 in back rent.
- **Utility assistance:** Pays utilities and overdue utility fees if negatively affecting families' ability to rent in the future.
- **Case management:** Staff develop goals and weekly plans to help families become more stable. Staff also refer families to supportive services, assist in the housing search process, conduct monthly home visits, and review families' monthly budgets.
- **Employment support services:** Staff identify and work to remove barriers to employment; administer skill and interest assessments; provide job search assistance, application support, and job training workshops.
- **Behavioral and/or physical health services:** Staff refer families for behavioral health sessions with the CalWORKs Behavioral Health Team to address emotional well-being, substance use disorders, domestic violence, or trauma.
- **Child care assistance:** Staff fund child care with providers of families' choice up to a child's 13th birthday for some families.

Model origins

California's 2014 Assembly Bill No. 74 requires the State Department of Social Services to provide instructions and funding to counties to implement Family Stabilization programs. At that time, Shasta County's CalWORKs had few housing services for families besides HAP and Permanent Homeless Assistance. Because the Permanent Homeless Assistance program's allowable limit for rental assistance did not meet rental prices in the county, HHSA began using allotted FaSt funds for housing assistance. In 2015, HHSA applied for and received HSP funds from the state CalWORKs program. To maximize these funding streams, HHSA began using HSP funds for rental assistance and FaSt funds for supportive services.

Key agencies

- **CalWORKs Management Council:** Several organizations that serve CalWORKs clients meet quarterly to discuss their services and programs: the local Continuum of Care (NorCal CoC), two PHAs, two homeless shelters, the Shasta Community Health Center, and the Veterans Resources Center. They supported HHSA with letters of recommendation for its initial HSP application with the state. The PHAs help expedite access to long-term housing subsidies for families receiving assistance from the HSP or FaSt programs.

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