

Issue BRIEF

Gretchen G. Kirby and Julia Lyskawa

Coordinating Employment Services Across the TANF and WIA Programs

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs provide employment and training services to a targeted population of low-income individuals. The TANF program provides these services predominantly to single women with children under age 18 as part of its broader mission to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. The WIA program focuses exclusively on providing employment and training services for a broad population of job seekers.¹ However, the WIA Adult program gives priority to low-income individuals, and TANF recipients automatically meet the program's income-based eligibility criteria. The nature of the services provided by each program varies in type and range, but the services overlap in providing upfront job readiness and job search assistance, career counseling, and job placement.

The similarities between the TANF and WIA programs have generated interest in the coordination and integration of services across the two programs since their inception in the late 1990s. The experiences in coordinating TANF and WIA services in the sites included in this study may be useful as federal, state, and local policy-makers plan the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law in July 2014.

Characteristics of the TANF and WIA Adult Programs

TANF program

Mission

Help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. Guided by four purposes:

1. Assisting needy families so that children may receive care in their own homes
2. Reducing the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage
3. Preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies
4. Encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families



Population served

Primarily low-income single parents with children

WIA Adult program

Mission

Provide employment and training services to assist eligible individuals in finding and qualifying for meaningful employment and to help employers find the skilled workers they need to compete and succeed in business



Population served

All adults, 18 years and older, are eligible for core services; priority for public assistance and other low-income individuals for additional services when funds are limited

STUDY SITES:

- **California**
Sonoma County
- **Connecticut**
Department of Social Services (DSS) North, DSS South
- **Florida**
Region 14, Pinellas County
- **Iowa**
Region 16, Burlington
- **Minnesota**
Hennepin County, Stearns County
- **New York**
New York City
- **Texas**
Region 6, Dallas
- **Utah**
Wasatch Front North, Wasatch Front South

STUDY APPROACH

The Study of TANF/WIA Coordination, initiated in 2011 by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, explored the supports, strategies, and considerations that influence TANF/WIA coordination within selected locations across the country. The study, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research and its partners, the Urban Institute and Don Winstead Consulting, was structured around interviews with state and local respondents in 8 states and 11 localities between February 2012 and May 2013 to address three research questions:

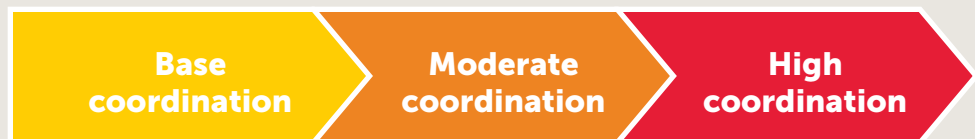
1. What are the potential benefits to the TANF and WIA programs and the people each serves of increased coordination of employment and training services?
2. What strategies do states and localities use to increase coordination between the TANF and WIA programs in providing employment and training services? What factors support increased coordination?
3. What considerations from the experience of study sites can inform the replicability of coordination efforts in other states or localities?

We structured our data collection and analysis around six components of coordination as shown in Figure 1. Within each of the six components, we identified a range of specific strategies used by the study sites. By assessing differences in circumstances, structures, or other factors that play into each strategy across the sites, we defined coordination at a base, moderate, and high level for each strategy. Presenting the strategies along a continuum makes the broad concept of “coordination” accessible in digestible pieces and provides an opportunity for other states and localities to adopt strategies appropriate to their context.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF COORDINATION BETWEEN THE TANF AND WIA PROGRAMS?

Coordination across the two programs generally aims to improve efficiency in service delivery and increase the effectiveness of the provided services. Within the framework of the present study, we cannot quantify the effects of TANF employment services (TANF ES) and WIA program coordination in terms of cost savings or individual outcomes. However, study respondents—administrators and staff of both the TANF ES and WIA programs—described the overarching goals as well as the benefits they perceive that each program brings to the services offered by the other.

Coordination Continuum and Components for the Study of TANF/WIA Coordination



- Administration and management
- Funding
- Policies and procedures
- Program missions and knowledge
- Services for customers
- Accountability and performance management

Figure 1

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¹ Title I of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 authorizes the WIA Adult, Dislocated, and Youth programs that separately serve these respective populations

BENEFITS WIA BRINGS TO TANF SERVICES

- Access to services within AJCs such as job search resource rooms and workshops to enhance job search and job readiness skills²
- Access to business services and job development staff within AJCs
- Use of labor market information to guide employment and training decisions

BENEFITS TANF BRINGS TO WIA SERVICES

- Addressing low-income workers' employment barriers
- Addressing deficiencies in basic skills
- Flexible resources to address client needs and infrastructure supports

Goals of coordination

As reported by study respondents, three overarching goals provided the motivating force behind coordination efforts across the TANF ES and WIA programs.

- Streamlined communication with and improved access to services for individuals and employers
- Efficient use of staff and financial resources to maximize services and minimize duplication across the programs
- Employment services connected to employer needs for all job seekers

Benefits of coordination

Many of the benefits of coordination reported by respondents in the study are consistent with those highlighted in earlier research. Specifically, WIA's value is the workforce lens that connects employment and training services to the needs of local employers (GAO 2011; Wright and Montiel 2011) and that broadens access to an array of services within the AJC (Werner and Lodewick 2004). TANF's value is the customer lens with respect to employment preparation. The TANF program mission's social services aspect promotes the development of community connections and resources that address basic skill deficiencies and identifies employment barriers (Martinson 1999; Werner and Lodewick 2004). When the two programs combine perspectives and coordinate services, individuals and employers may both benefit.

WHAT LEADS TO TANF/WIA COORDINATION?

The study explored with state and local respondents the catalysts and supports that helped make coordination take place between the TANF ES and WIA programs. Catalysts are the factors or circumstances that initially sparked movement toward greater coordination between the TANF ES and WIA programs; they are the factors that made coordination happen in the first place. Supports are the factors or circumstances that made coordination efforts easy to implement and maintain.

Catalysts of coordination

Three catalysts appeared to foster TANF/WIA coordination. The study sites characterized by active coordination suggest that state or local leaders sparked or led the coordination efforts in response to programming and the funding environment for TANF and WIA. At a secondary level, we observed funding levels across the sites that appear to have contributed to the initiation of TANF/WIA coordination, especially the flow of funding for TANF employment services through the workforce development system or an infusion of funds for collaborative efforts that serve as catalysts for TANF/WIA coordination.

- TANF/WIA coordination sparked by changing environments for the TANF and WIA programs
- TANF/WIA coordination more likely when funding for TANF employment services flows through the workforce development system
- Short-term, targeted funding a catalyst for TANF/WIA collaboration but often without fostering long-term coordination or integration

Supports for coordination

An examination of the range of strategies for TANF/WIA coordination across the study sites (described in the next section) shows that three supports emerged as important in determining the level of coordination a site may be able to achieve. The supports enhance sites' ability to (1) staff and manage the programs along similar lines because the same local entity administers or operates the two programs; (2) communicate across staff to share knowledge and, in some cases, deliver needed services through co-location; and (3) focus on shared goals and performance measures, in part, because of existing efforts to integrate workforce development services within the AJC.

- Same local entity administering or operating the TANF ES and WIA programs
- Co-location of TANF employment and WIA services
- WIA and Wagner-Peyser/ES integration and a shared registration process within the AJC

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² Resource rooms and some workshops are often funded through the Wagner-Peyser program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor rather than or in addition to the WIA program. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 brought these services together under the One-Stop Career Centers, now called AJCs.

WHAT TANF/WIA COORDINATION STRATEGIES DO SITES USE?

The findings provide information about 12 strategies for TANF/WIA coordination within 6 components that are in use in the study sites and that other locations may choose to replicate. Using the practices of the study sites, we defined levels of coordination for each of the 12 strategies. Base coordination represents the minimum practice in building common ground across the two programs. Moderate coordination builds on the base and adds practices that increase coordination between the programs. High coordination includes

the base and moderate practices and adds practices that further promote commonalities across the TANF and WIA programs.

We found that some sites are intentional in their approach to increasing the level of coordination between the two programs. Other sites do not place an emphasis on TANF/WIA coordination, although, by their nature, some strategies give rise to such coordination. The extent of coordination may fluctuate with the policy and funding environment or with the willingness of administrators to take risks in service delivery innovation or performance measurement.

TANF/WIA Coordination Strategies Used in Study Sites, by Program Component

Administration and management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create common administrative and management structures with oversight for the TANF ES and WIA programs lodged in the same agency or with the same person 2. Align job classifications and pay scales across the TANF ES and WIA programs
Funding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Use funds from across the TANF ES and WIA programs to support common services
Policies and procedures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Use common procedures and tools to serve customers in the TANF ES and WIA programs 5. Develop shared data systems to support ease in tracking customers and service delivery across the TANF and WIA programs
Program missions and knowledge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Emphasize goal of employment in a common way across the TANF ES and WIA programs 7. Increase cross-program knowledge and understanding of the TANF ES and WIA programs among staff members
Services for customers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Provide common job search and job readiness supports and services to TANF ES and WIA customers in the American Job Center 9. Deliver career counseling and training coordination services to TANF and WIA customers through formalized referral processes 10. Refer TANF ES customers to WIA to access education and training opportunities 11. Provide common job development and placement services to TANF ES and WIA customers
Accountability and performance measurement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Use the same measures in the TANF ES and WIA programs to track progress toward customer and program goals

Source: Interviews conducted for the Study of TANF/WIA Coordination.

Overall, we found that the TANF and WIA programs are generally parallel operating programs with varying levels of coordination across specific strategies. No strategy is highly coordinated across all 11 sites, but moderate to high levels of coordination are more prevalent for some strategies over others. (See Figure 2)

Differences in program characteristics drive the distinction between the TANF ES and WIA

programs. The points of service delivery (and the associated structures) that are common to both programs generally allow for easier coordination: entry points to service, upfront job skills and job readiness services, and job development and placement (reflected in Strategies 5, 7, 8, and 11). The two programs diverge in services and coordination with respect to the events that occur between job search and job development (reflected in Strategies 9, 10, and 12). TANF recipients must

Level of Coordination by Strategy

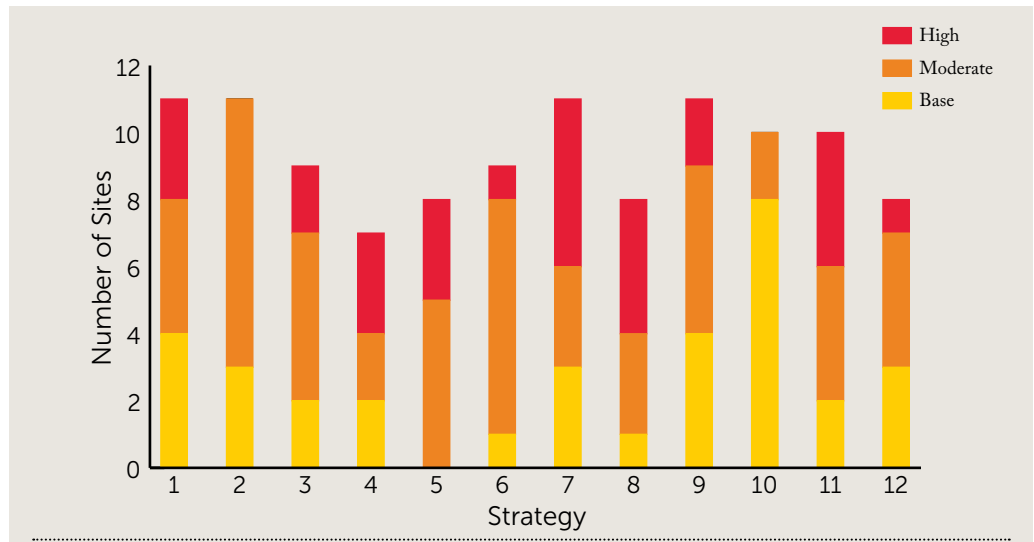


Figure 2

Source: Analysis of interviews conducted for the Study of TANF/WIA Coordination.

Note: Strategies for which total does not reach 11 indicates that some sites did not achieve the criteria for a base level of coordination.

participate in work or a work-related activity to meet the work participation rate. WIA customers have the opportunity to pursue services to support career development—intensive career counseling, assessments, and training.

The extent to which coordination occurs is largely determined by how much TANF program administrators are willing to operate the program along the lines of the WIA program. Given that WIA legislation requires service delivery within the structure of AJCs and serves a broad population of job seekers, the TANF ES program must find ways to fit in (if it chooses to do so). Coordination above a base level for most, if not all, strategies requires co-location of program services within the AJCs.

Relating findings to practice: A site’s choice of strategies and level of coordination involves consideration of several inputs and tradeoffs.

Nonetheless, any site or state may capitalize on opportunities for TANF/WIA coordination. The first step may be deciding on the goals for coordination at the customer, staff, and program levels. Then, the information on strategies at various levels of coordination included in this report can help inform planning and gauge progress.

SUPPORTS FOR FUTURE TANF/WIA COORDINATION

To the extent that increased TANF/WIA coordination is a goal, federal or state administrators may support future efforts in several ways.

Sharing information on strategies.

The experience of the study sites suggests that coordination between the TANF ES and WIA programs—to a high level—is indeed possible. To various degrees, the study sites have addressed the factors often noted as presenting

the most significant obstacles—differences in program philosophies and performance measures. Providing information on strategies and methods used in different locations—such as through the present study—can support planning and action to increase coordination.

Alleviating inhibitors. State and local administrators are creative in developing coordinated structures across the TANF ES and WIA programs but ultimately feel constrained by policy differences that affect both daily implementation and big-picture program approaches. The two programs are likely to continue functioning in parallel—maximizing common space and services where possible but maintaining distinctions in service delivery to meet customer needs and to report on performance goals. Further increases in coordination may need action at the federal level to align policies and performance measures.

Providing motivation. TANF/WIA coordination may not be an emphasis for states and localities given the range of issues administrators must address. Motivation may need to come in the form of quantitative evidence of the benefits of coordination in producing cost efficiencies for programs and improved services and outcomes for individuals. Federal or state administrators could support research on the evidence of effectiveness of coordinated service delivery approaches or cost savings produced through coordination. It is possible that additional action at the state or local level may need a system change initiative accompanied by a funding incentive.

CHANGES IN THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

WIOA replaces the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), altering the public workforce system in ways that may be more responsive to the education and training needs of low-income and low-skilled individuals. The Department

of Labor will develop regulations to support implementation of WIOA. The experiences in coordinating TANF and WIA services in the 11 sites included in this study can help inform policy and practice under WIOA.

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For further detail on the findings from this study and the strategies used for coordination within the study sites, please refer to Kirby, Gretchen, Julia Lyskawa, Michelle Derr, and Elizabeth Brown. “Coordinating Employment Services Across the TANF and WIA Programs.” Report for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, forthcoming.

This brief was prepared under Contract # HHSP23320095642WC/HHSP2337032T with the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This report and other reports sponsored by the Office of Research, Planning and Evaluation are available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre>.

Suggested citation: Kirby, G., Lyskawa, J. (2015). Coordinating Employment Services Across the TANF and WIA Programs. OPRE Report #2015-03. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation.

Prepared for:
Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
Project Officer: Girley Wright

Prepared by:
Mathematica Policy Research
1100 1st Street, N.E. Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20002-4221
Principal Director: Michelle Derr
Principal Investigator: Gretchen Kirby

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