

# **TANF Roundtable Discussion**

*Sponsors: Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, Institute of Politics  
Concordia Club – Oakland - Pittsburgh  
March 6, 2001*

## **MEETING REPORT**

### **Contents**

---

#### I. Introduction

#### II. Discussion Summary

- Problems with the Status Quo
  - Work/ Wages
  - Training/ Routes to Career Advancement
  - Childcare/ Child Welfare
  - Healthcare
  - Data Deficiencies
  - Additional Program Design Concerns
- Questions
- Political Context/ Strategy
- Recommendations

#### III. Consensus Items

#### IV. List of Participants

### **I. Introduction**

---

On March 3, 2001, the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board (TRWIB) and the University of Pittsburgh's Institute of Politics (IOP) held a roundtable discussion on the upcoming reauthorization of the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Participants represented a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including operators of TANF-funded programs, public decision-makers, foundations, private employers, community-based organizations and researchers. The group agreed that the following problems impede TANF from effectively helping families achieve self sufficiency:

- Tight restrictions on what the TANF authorizing legislation considers "work activity."
- Inflexible time limits on the receipt of TANF cash assistance.
- A lack of coordination among agencies providing workforce development and support services.

The group also raised a number of issues that merit additional attention, including the need for better tracking of current and former TANF recipients and problems with the implementation of various programs intended to help low-income people.

### **II. Discussion Summary**

---

Note: the following Discussion Summary reflects all comments made by the roundtable participants and does not necessarily reflect a consensus on every item.

#### ***Problems with the Status Quo***

##### *Work/ Wages*

- The current model for moving people on public assistance into work has been reasonably effective at moving people into jobs, but has not been effective at moving them into jobs that pay living wages.
- Single mothers are not receiving the support they need to advance, due to limitations surrounding childcare and training.

- An economic downturn will create serious consequences for having moved people so quickly into dead-end jobs.
- It would be more strategic to move people into jobs that are critical to the economy and increase their quality of life.

#### *Training/ Routes to Career Advancement*

- Case managers currently cannot include training as a “work activity,” which undermines their clients’ ability to prepare for jobs leading to self-sufficiency.
- Can TANF play a role in helping people advance after getting their “foot in the door” with entry level jobs?
- Current regulations and time limits impede TANF from supporting lifelong learning, particularly when people start out with major basic skill deficiencies.
- Lifelong learning is the key to continued job retention and advancement.
- There should be training beyond publicly funded programs through employers’ use of training and tuition reimbursement to promote internal advancement; there are also public-private partnerships to accomplish this.
- Work is being done to identify corporations with low-wage career paths. Healthcare is one industry that has the ability to create these career paths, but progression doesn’t exist without education. GED and high school are no longer the only educational advancement options for low-income people.

#### *Childcare/ Child Welfare*

- A large number of two-parent families on TANF still live below the poverty line.
- Many families do not have access to adequate childcare.
- Children are not being adequately prepared for school.
- Childcare doesn’t necessarily lead to long-term solutions – we need to move the focus from childcare to preparing children for school.

#### *Healthcare*

- Many people are unaware of when they are entitled to keep their health insurance despite leaving the cash assistance and consequently go without insurance they are entitled to receive.
- There is a lot of confusion about eligibility issues. Participants should know what their position is.

#### *Data Deficiencies*

- Tracking of people once they leave the welfare roles is inadequate to provide good information on the long-term impacts of programs and program time limits.
- We need to look at the role government could play in a case management system to follow people longer to see how their careers advance.
- We need to better understand:
  - why the earned income tax is not used by more people who are eligible for it.
  - the role of Medicaid.
  - the characteristics and needs of the 20% “carve out” in Pennsylvania.
- There is currently not integration of data across the system used by the various public agencies involved in welfare and workforce development programs; this is due in part to confidentiality concerns.
- The lack of data integration and other data deficits impede our ability to do effective strategic planning.
- One reason there is inadequate data is that data is not always politically desirable.

#### *Additional Program Design Concerns*

- Time limits on cash assistance raise concerns regarding TANF’s ability to function as a safety net in an economic downturn.
- The requirement to do a job search and also work part-time is very difficult to schedule along with any necessary training.

- TANF focused on non-custodial parents (mostly men); with many of these parents caught up in the court system because of issues of non-support, it is difficult to find them and work with them. This affects the well-being of their families.
- In the beginning, welfare-to-work clients were not considered TANF clients, which kept some people out of the system who should be in it.
- There is currently little flexibility in the system to take into account individual circumstances.
- There is significant lack of coordination and communication between the various federal and state agencies that administer welfare and workforce development programs. Similar problems exist between local agencies within and across county lines.

### **Questions**

- What role do Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) have in creating and providing access to living wage jobs?
- How do/ should WIBs and welfare agencies interact?
- Whose responsibility is it to maintain people? Is that the responsibility of TANF or individuals?
- Where is the public system failing?

### **Political Context/ Strategy**

- Need to identify potential changes to the law that are politically feasible; school readiness and workforce development efforts have significant support.
- Need to identify measures that can be addressed without money and without changing laws, like the problems with administering healthcare programs.
- Need to address spending surplus dollars.
- Need to identify the flexibility we need to retain.
- The introduction of TANF was based on the government dictating behavior on the part of public assistance recipients; we should now change the focus to alleviating child poverty.
- One strategy for proposing changes is to say “we won” in making significant strides towards initial program goals (including increasing engagement in work) and say “what’s next?” in advancing self-sufficiency.

### **Recommendations**

- Make education a “work activity” for TANF purposes and performance measures.
- Give local areas additional flexibility to address individual needs.
- When trying to sustain employment, emergencies often come along that prevent people from being able to work or being able to balance their competing responsibilities; we need to develop back-up systems to address this.
- Engage in more partnerships with corporations, which have significant resources available for workforce development.
- Address administrative problems that keep people from getting the benefits for which they already qualify.

## **III. Consensus Items**

The following measures are necessary to make TANF an effective tool in helping families achieve self-sufficiency and career advancement through lifelong learning:

- Make education a “work activity” for TANF purposes and performance measures.
- Modify time limits on cash assistance to enable TANF to support clients in receiving the training and transitional support they need to obtain jobs that lead to self-sufficiency.
- Improve coordination among the federal agencies that administer welfare and workforce development programs.

## IV. List of Participants

---

| <b>Name</b>          | <b>Affiliation</b>                                     |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Ty Alexander         | Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield                        |
| Rachel Canning       | Just Harvest                                           |
| Ray Engel            | University of Pittsburgh - School of Social Work       |
| Karen Feinstein      | Jewish Healthcare Foundation                           |
| Kate Garvey          | Allegheny County Department of Human Services          |
| Jeffrey R. Gilbert   | PPG Industries, Inc.                                   |
| Annette Green        | The Pittsburgh Foundation                              |
| Robert M. Grom       | Heritage Health Foundation                             |
| Elaine Harris-Fulton | Wilkinsburg Family Support Center                      |
| Gerri Kay            | The Pittsburgh Foundation                              |
| Allen Kukovich       | Senate of Pennsylvania                                 |
| Bryce Maretzky       | University of Pittsburgh - Office of Child Development |
| Ray Murphy           | Just Harvest                                           |
| Dorry Lang           | Allegheny County                                       |
| Barbara M. Parees    | City of Pittsburgh                                     |
| Tim Cornell          | Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare              |
| Howard Turner        | Allegheny County Housing Authority                     |
| Reggie Young         | Allegheny County                                       |
| Philip Manion        | Allegheny County Housing Authority                     |
| Anne McCafferty      | University of Pittsburgh – Institute of Politics       |
| Dennis P. McManus    | University of Pittsburgh – Institute of Politics       |
| Julia Indovina       | University of Pittsburgh – Institute of Politics       |
| Terry Miller         | University of Pittsburgh – Institute of Politics       |
| Marie Hamblett       | University of Pittsburgh – Institute of Politics       |
| Ron Painter          | Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board                |
| Hannah Holm          | Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board                |
| Melissa Swauger      | Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board                |