

Summary Report on Engagement in Additional Work Activities (ACF-812)

Maine Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF)
Report Period: March 1—March 31, 2011

Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Office for Family Independence

Summary

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) ended the Aid to Families with Dependent Children cash assistance program and created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program. This changed the focus of the program to be temporary financial assistance, with the goal of moving individuals from public cash assistance to self-sufficiency. Congress established the 'work participation rate' as the tool to measure the success of each State's ability to meet this goal. The PRWORA required 25% of all families in each state to be engaged in work activities in FY 1997. The requirement rose to an overall participation rate of 50% and a 90% participation rate for two-parent families in 2002. States that fail to achieve these participation rates are subject to a financial penalty. The work participation rate focuses on 'work eligible individuals' (WEI's) and whether or not the WEI is engaged in specific work activities.

The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 reauthorized the TANF program through 2010. The DRA included regulations to ensure consistent measurement of work participation rates among all states. The regulations included: defining work activities; establishing and maintaining work participation verification procedures; and the circumstances in which parents of children receiving assistance should be considered in the work participation rate calculations.

Section 812 of the Claims Resolution Act of 2010 requires each State to submit a 'Report on Engagement in Additional Work Activities.' The report must be submitted for two reporting periods. The first reporting period is from March 1 through March 31, 2011 and the reports are due no later than May 31, 2011. The second reporting period is from April 1 through June 30, 2011 and the reports are due no later than August 31, 2011. For each work-eligible individual (WEI) in a family receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance during the reporting period, States must collect and report the following information:

- (1) whether the individual engaged in any activities that are directed toward attaining self-sufficiency and
- (2) if yes, the specific activities that
 - (a) do not qualify as a countable work activity, but are otherwise reasonably calculated to help the family move to self-sufficiency or
 - (b) that could be a countable work activity, but for the fact that either the WEI has not engaged in such activities for a sufficient number of hours; the WEI has reached a maximum time limit allowed for having participation in the activity count; or the number of WEIs engaged in such activity exceeds a statutory limitation.

A) a summary of the information submitted in the report

“(B) an analysis statement regarding the extent to which the information changes measures of total engagement in work activities from what was (or will be) reported by the State in the quarterly report submitted under subsection(a) for the comparable period; and
“(C) a narrative describing the most common activities contained in the report that are not countable toward the State participation rates under section 407.

Definition of Work Eligible Individual (WEI)

A ‘work eligible individual’ is an adult (or minor parent head-of-household) recipient of TANF cash assistance or a non-recipient parent living with a child receiving cash assistance unless the parent is:

- a minor parent, but not the head-of-household;
- a non-citizen who is ineligible to receive assistance due to his or her immigration status;
- a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipient;
- a parent providing care for a disabled family member living in the home; or
- a parent receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits

For a WEI to count towards the work participation rate, the individual must have verified participation in countable activities for a specific number of hours each month. Parents with children 6 years of age and older, must participate in a countable activity for 30 hours a week for each week they are receiving a TANF benefit. Parents with children under 6 years old must participate for 20 hours. Families with two parents must participate an average of 35 hours a week.

Countable work activities are limited to:

- Unsubsidized employment;
- Subsidized employment;
- Community work experience;
- Community service;
- On-the-job training;
- Vocational education/training; and
- Job search/job readiness

WEIs with a 30 hour requirement must participate in the above activities for at least 20 hours and then also participate for 10 more hours in the above and/or:

- Job skills training;
- Education directly related to employment; and
- Satisfactory attendance of Secondary School/GED

There are limits to how long an individual may be engaged in vocational education (twelve-month lifetime limit) and job search/job readiness training (limited to six weeks in a twelve-month period.) Because Maine meets the definition of ‘needy state’ under 45 CFR § 260.30, the job search/job readiness limit increases to twelve weeks in a twelve-month period. There is an additional limit for job search: an individual’s participation in job search/job readiness does not count for a week that follows four consecutive weeks of job search/job readiness activities.

All other activities are considered ‘non-countable’.

Analysis

Maine's May 31, 2011 Summary Report is based on March 2011 data and is not a statistically valid representation of Maine's annual caseload. Individuals may fall into more than one category, for example an individual may be participating in a work activity but not for enough hours to be counted and not have met verification rules for other hours to be counted. Therefore that individual is reported in two categories. Additionally, States do not have the opportunity to resubmit data if new information is received or if data entry errors are discovered. For these reasons, this data may be inconsistent with what will be reported by Maine in the quarterly TANF report.

This is Maine's first Engagement in Additional Work Activities for the reporting period of March 1 through March 31, 2011. Maine submits TANF data for the entire caseload and did so for this report.

For March 2011,

- Total WEI's included in the TANF caseload in March 2011 15,040
- Of these 15,040 individuals 2,205 (14.66%) are meeting participation. Of the remaining individuals, 8,636 are participating in a work activity leading to self-sufficiency but are not meeting participation because:
 - The activity is not countable under federal guidelines:
 - 2,572 work eligible individuals had a documented medical condition and were applying for disability
 - 2,628 individuals were participating but did not have enough hours to meet TANF work requirements
 - 3,026 individuals were participating but unable to meet verification requirements
 - 397 individuals were participating in an activity beyond a statutory limit for reporting participation
 - 13 individuals were participating in other activities
- Of the 15,040 WEI's in Maine 4,199 (28%) had no hours of participation

WEI's with No hours of participation

Individuals with no activities fall into two categories: those required to participate in work activities but not doing so and those not required to participate by state or federal regulation. '

Principle reason for not participating:

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| • Families first month of Assistance | 564 | 6.44% |
| • Individual Assigned but work activity hasn't begun yet | 468 | 5.34% |
| • State Failed to Engage Individual (sanction) | 386 | 4.41% |
| • Individual Relocating to Local Jurisdiction | 855 | 9.76% |
| • Individual in Process of Being Sanctioned for non-compliance | 547 | 6.25% |
| • Family Disregarded | 257 | 2.93% |
| ○ Child under 1 | | |
| ○ First 3 mos of sanction | | |
| • Exempt State caring for disabled family member | 261 | 2.98% |
| • Pending Review/Assessment | 2,093 | 23.90% |
| • Other State Exemption | 103 | 1.17% |
| ○ Language limited | | |
| ○ Transportation | | |
| ○ Child care | | |

- Legal issues
- Learning disability
- Alcohol/substance abuse
- Housing

Data shows that 2,093 work eligible individuals with no countable hours are pending review/assessment. Assessment is critical to the success of the individual

Most Common Activities Not Included in Maine's Participation Rate

In March 2011, 10,841 (79.6%) of Maine's 15,040 total work eligible individuals actively participated in work activities designed to lead to self-sufficiency. However, only 2,250 (14.66%) were countable and had enough hours to count toward Maine's work participation rate. The most common activities not countable included partial participation in countable activities, participation in non-countable activities and the inability to meet verification requirements. Other non-countable activities included activities over the statutory limit like Job Search/Job Readiness, finding and arranging support services such as child care or transportation, and obtaining a driver's license, participating in activities with social service agencies including child welfare staff and probation officers.

A significant group, 2,572 individuals (17% of the total WEIs), of those participating in a non-countable activity are considered work-eligible and therefore included in the mandatory work participation rate calculation, but have a documented medical condition. These individuals are not currently eligible for a state or federal financial disability program. These could be families who have already applied for a disability program awaiting a disability determination or an appeal decision, or those who have shorter-term illnesses/disabilities who are unable to participate for a specified period of time.

Conclusion

A review of Maine's Summary results indicates WEI's are participating in a variety of activities designed to lead them to self-sufficiency whether or not those activities are countable toward the federal participation rate. Whether by partial participation in countable activities or by participation in non-countable activities, Maine encourages individuals to participate to the degree they are capable. Maine hopes that nationwide survey results will lead to additional flexibility in rules designed to capture the success of the TANF program.

In addition the review reflects Maine's struggle with arduous federal verification requirements. 3,026 or 20% of Maine's total work eligible individuals are participating in a work activity but were unable to meet federal verification standards. These activities are not counted in Maine's work participation rate. Individuals participating in Maine' nationally-recognized Parent's as Scholars (PaS) Program in which participants are enrolled in a 2 or 4 year post secondary degree program are an example. One can reasonably draw the conclusion that if the student's grade point average exceeds the minimum to participate in the program the student is participating the required number of hours. However, these hours do not count unless a weekly written statement is provided from the Professor verifying the student was in class. Collecting the paper verification and the related data entry procedures for the nearly 700 PaS participants is a challenge to say the least.

The ability to count activities that lead to self-sufficiency such as obtaining a driver's license, enhancing literacy and/or high school completion, applying for disability and partial participation and the flexibility of states to ease federal verification standards would result in Maine's ability to meet the federal work participation rate and would allow staff to concentrate on their job of moving families from welfare to work.