Recent Trends & Innovative Job Search Strategies for Disadvantaged Populations

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Policy Context

• Job search assistance (JSA) is a critical component of TANF and other programs aimed to promote family self-sufficiency

• Little is known about effective JSA strategies

• States and localities are often under scrutiny to demonstrate that JSA and other program investments improve employment outcomes
Presentation Overview

• TANF program environment
• Background on JSA
• Examples of JSA strategies
• Efforts to increase JSA outcomes
Data Sources

• Data collection for the Work Participation and TANF/WIA Coordination Study
  – Site visits to 11 communities in 8 states
    • Sonoma County, CA; Hartford and Norwich, CT; Pinellas County, FL; Burlington, IA; Hennepin and Stearns counties, MN; New York City, NY; Dallas, TX; Wasatch Front North and South Regions, UT
  – Telephone interviews with 30 state TANF administrators
  – Document review (e.g., policy manuals, management reports, organizational materials, etc.)
TANF Program Environment
Changing Demands

- Decrease in federal funding to support TANF programs
  - Declining value and reallocation of the TANF block grant
  - Discontinuation of federal supplemental grants

- Increase in the demand for public assistance programs

- High unemployment, fewer full-time jobs
Responses by States and Localities

• Explicit efforts to reduce program costs
  – Reductions in state and local administrative and program staffing
  – Reduction in the amount of the cash grant
  – Decreased availability of work and personal supports

• Limit TANF caseload growth

• Modified contracts with local employment service providers

• Rethinking TANF practices and performance measures
Background on JSA
Background on JSA

• JSA counts toward the federal work participation rate (WPR) for a limited time; although, states often allow clients to participate longer

• JSA services are typically locally defined

• TANF agencies often rely on contracted service providers for JSA activities
  – Each brings agency culture (for example American Job Centers)
  – Additional layer of administration and coordination
Background on JSA (cont.)

• Monitoring and tracking JSA is typically state defined, locally implemented
  – Variables and processes differ across states
  – Data quality varies within and across states
  – Cross-state comparisons in JSA is challenging

• For federal reporting, there is an emphasis on process rather than outcome measures
Examples of JSA Strategies
Basic Components of JSA

• Assessment
• Self-directed job search
• Group job search
• Individualized counseling
• “Life skills”/resilience training
• Job development
Examples of JSA Strategies

• TANF applicant job search requirements
  – New York City’s upfront job search (4 weeks)
  – Minnesota’s Diversionary Work Program (4 months)

• Use of assessments to assign TANF clients to service tracks
  – Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS) – comprehensive, ongoing assessment process
  – District of Columbia and Washington State

• Use of technology for self-directed job search
  – Pinellas County, Florida – JobSmart Lab self-directed online workshops and an e-course
  – DSS, North, Connecticut – Career TEAM
Examples of JSA Strategies (cont.)

• Structured group JSA activities
  – Iowa’s “Six Steps to a Successful Career Transition”

• Building “life skills”/executive functioning
  – Utah DWS - “Work Success” structured job search program
Efforts to Increase JSA Outcomes
Increasing JSA Outcomes

• Create useful, motivational activities
• Use incentives to reward progress and completion of employment activities
• Actively monitor program process and outcomes
• Use performance-based contracts that reward engagement and/or employment
For More Information

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