

# Understanding the Data Capacity and Needs of State TANF Agencies

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# The TDC Team

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# TANF Data Collaborative

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- *“TDC supports TANF agency efforts to routinely use TANF and other administrative data to inform policy and practice, with the intention to improve employment and well-being outcomes for individuals and families.”*
- Needs Assessment includes:
  - Survey
  - Secondary sources
  - Stakeholder interviews
- Needs Assessment is intended to:
  - Informs technical assistance to states
  - Informs the field about the status of data use in TANF

# Family Self-Sufficiency Data Center Needs Assessment ~2013

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- Needs assessment found that states had:
  - limited analytic capacity
  - challenges around linking data, and
  - challenges around sharing data
- Allard, S. W., Wiegand, E. R., Schlecht, C., Datta, A. R., Goerge, R. M., & Weigensberg, E. (2018). State agencies' use of administrative data for improved practices: Needs, challenges, and opportunities. *Public Administration Review*, 78(2), 240-250.

# Practitioner Points

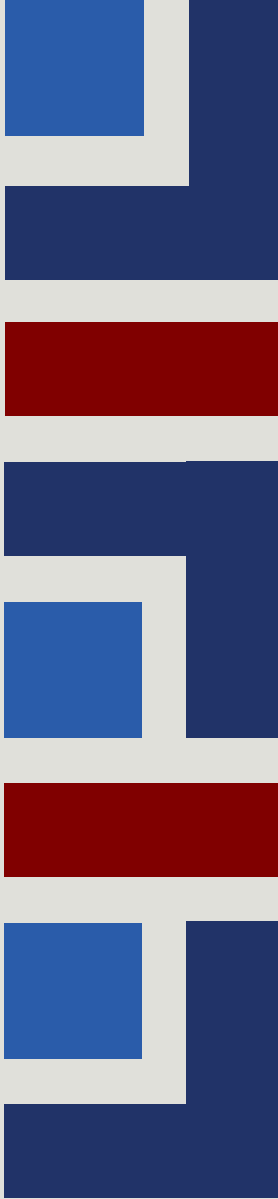
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- Improving data quality tends to involve intentional, but incremental, efforts to enhance the accuracy of data entry, reduce the prevalence of missing data, and create detailed data documentation.
- High-capacity administrative data users allocate staff time to reflect upon questions or metrics that extend beyond mandatory reports and will have immediate benefits to the agency and its clients.
- Agencies making consistent commitments to analytic activity outside of mandatory reporting do so by prioritizing and protecting staff time for such activities and developing data infrastructures that make data flexibly available for analytic work.
- Integrating analytics into program planning and design often requires intentional partnerships with external researchers, agencies in other states, charitable philanthropy, and federal agencies.
- States seeking to become field-leading learners build and share comprehensive data resources, participate in creative discussions about data analytics and program design, and support the learning of data users.

# TANF Needs Assessment Survey: Design and Implementation

Leah Gjertson

July 29, 2019



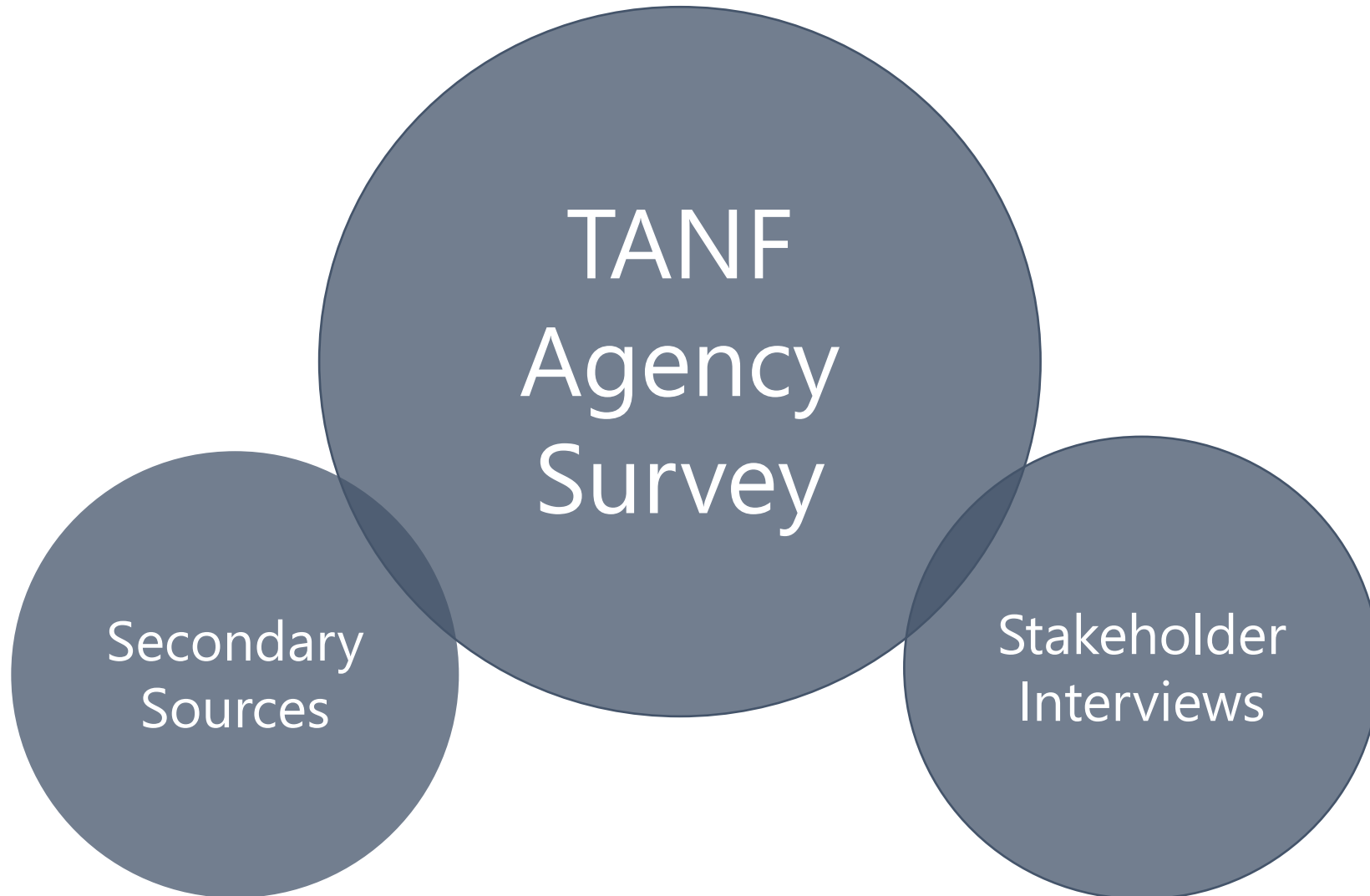
# TANF Data Collaborative (TDC)

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# Needs Assessment Data Collection

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TANF  
Agency  
Survey

Secondary  
Sources

Stakeholder  
Interviews



# Survey Goals

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Collect **firsthand information** about TANF agencies'



**capacities, capabilities,**

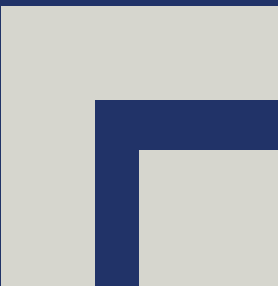


and **current use of data,**



desired areas of **technical assistance**

# Design & Data Collection



# Survey Design: 7 topical modules

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TANF Data  
Use &  
Opportunities

Data  
Collection &  
Documentation

Data  
Infrastructure

Data Sharing

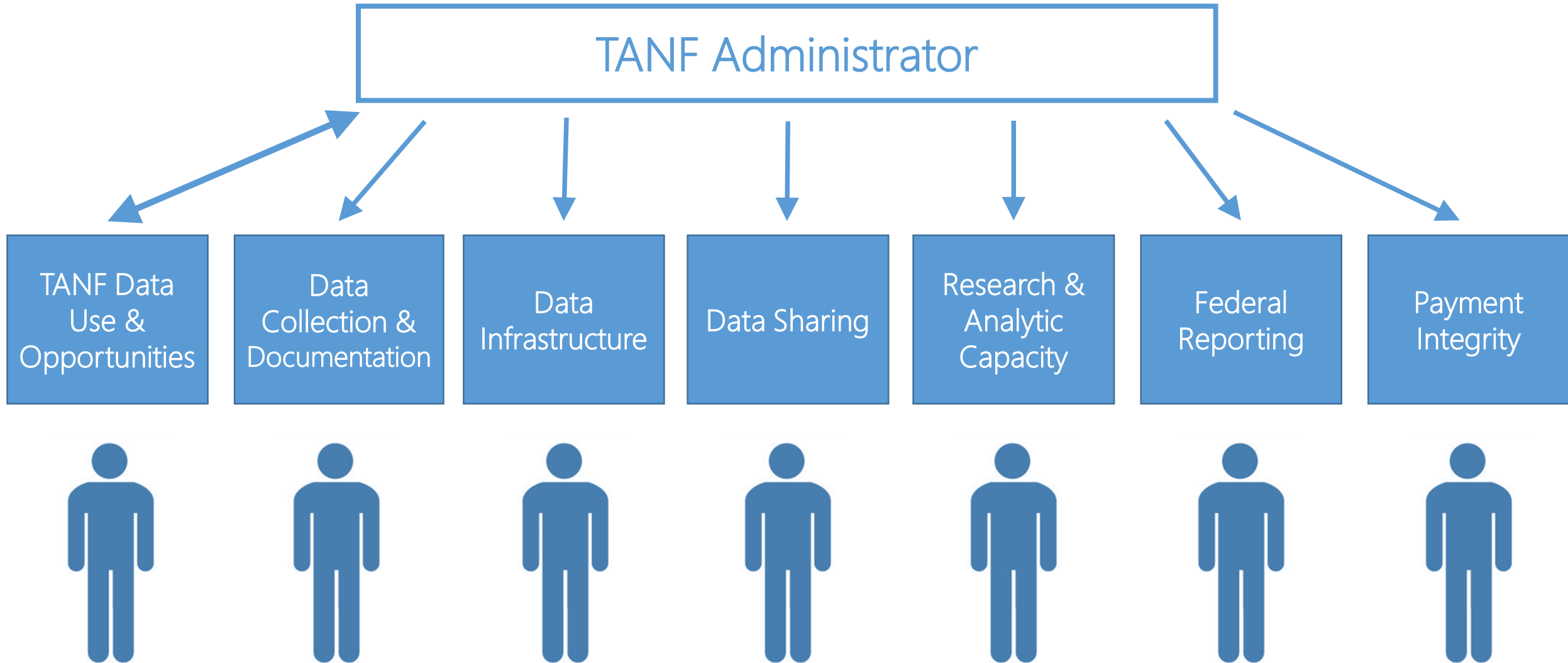
Research &  
Analytic  
Capacity

Federal  
Reporting

Payment  
Integrity

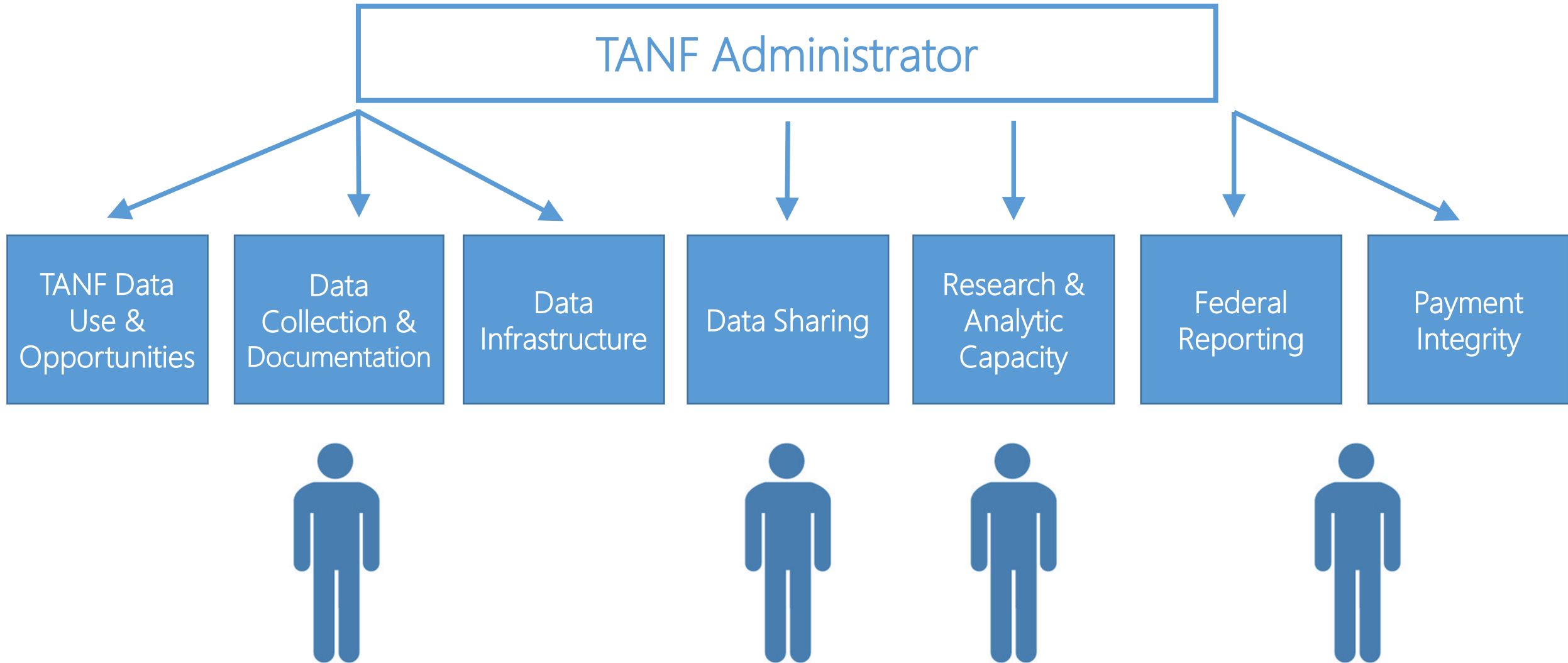
# Survey Administration Design

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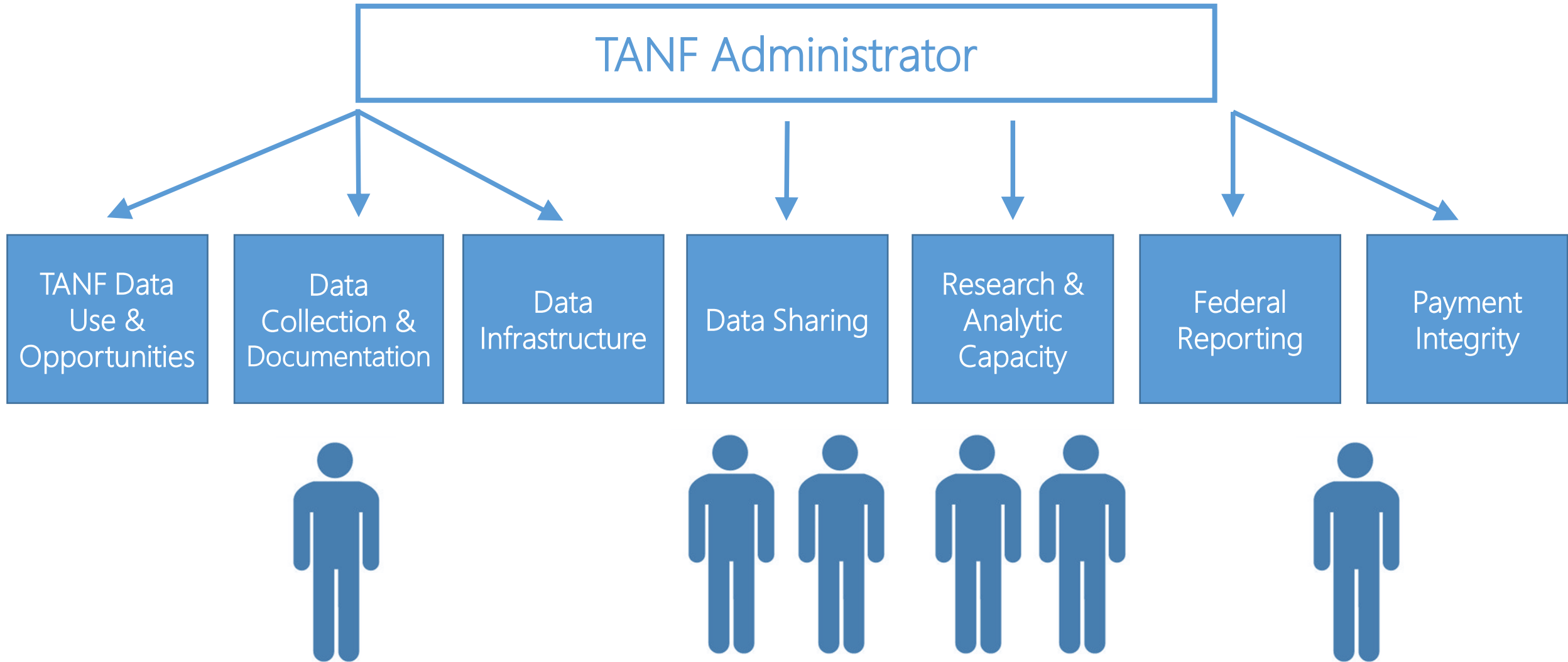
# Survey Administration

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# Survey Administration

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# Survey Data Collection



Survey Completion  
0% ————— 100%

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the [TANF Data Innovation](#) survey about how TANF agencies use data. The goal of this survey is to collect firsthand information about your capacities, capabilities, and current use of data. Your answers will help HHS to: (1) better understand the challenges and barriers states and territories face in using data and research to inform program decision making and (2) design future technical assistance activities for TANF agencies to address these challenges. We will report a summary of aggregate findings from the project survey back to you.

**Online Qualtrics survey fielded February 21, 2019 – July 15, 2019**

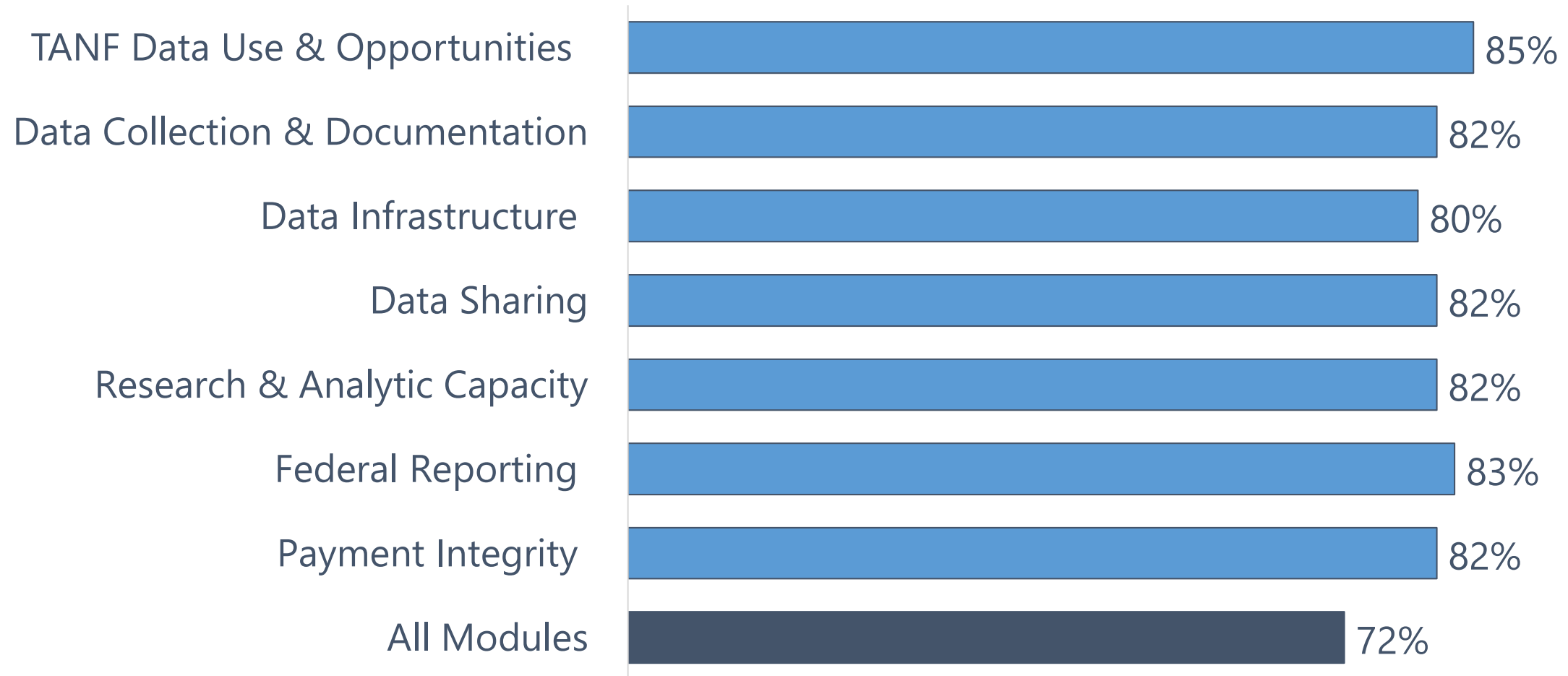
# Survey Responses





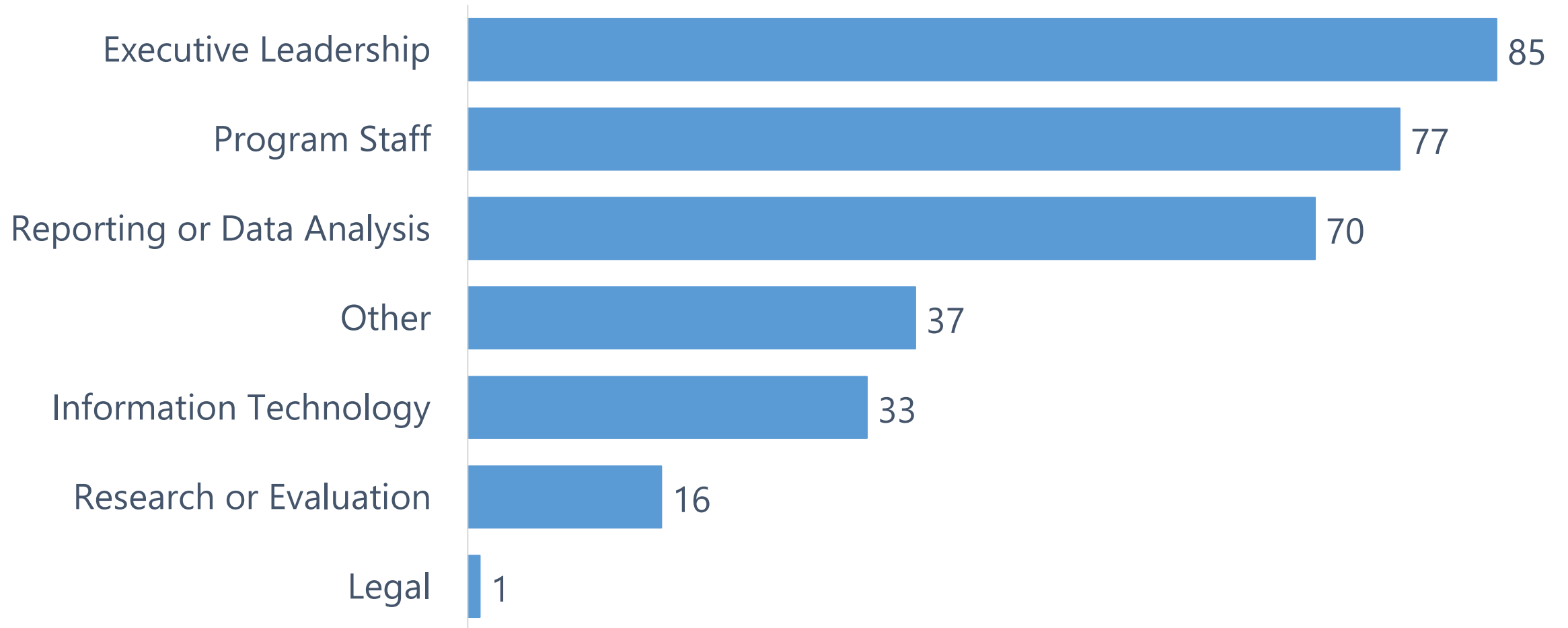
# Participation: 48 of 54 States/Territories

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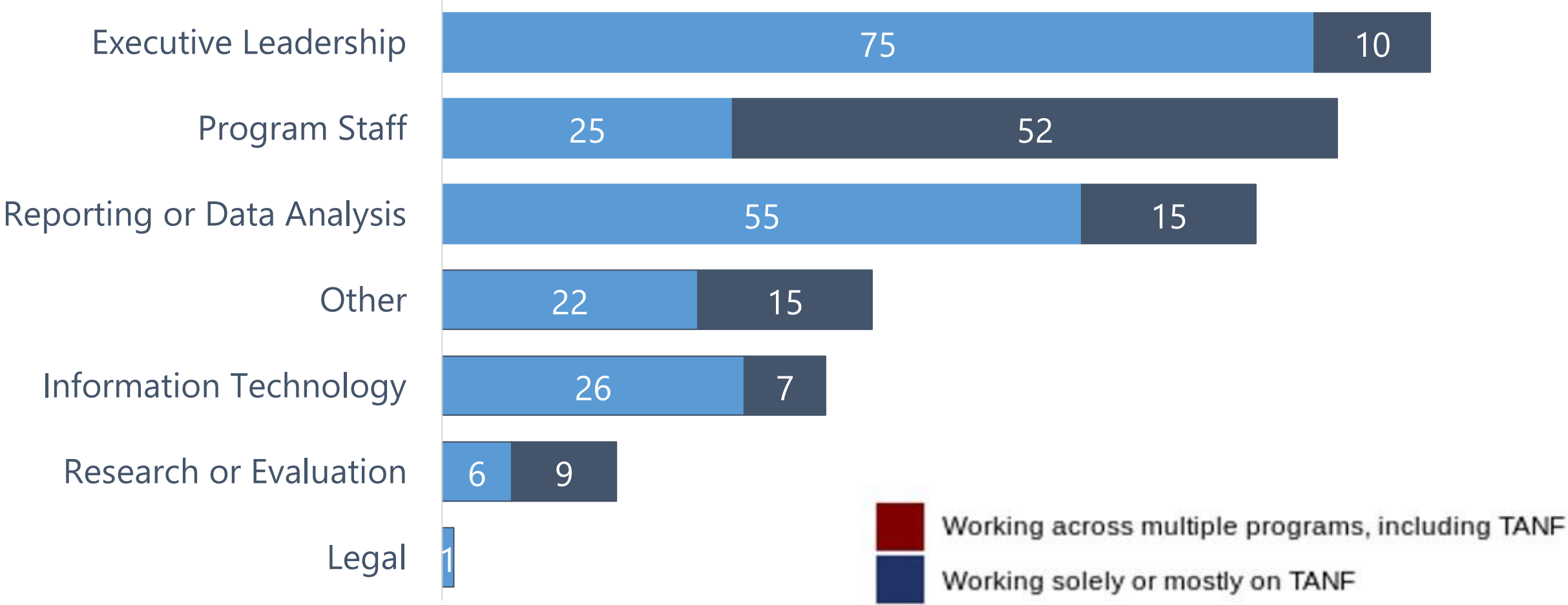


# Respondent Job Roles

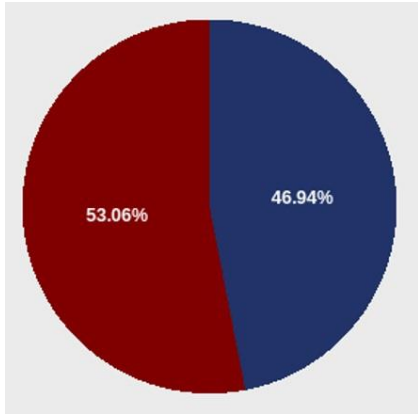
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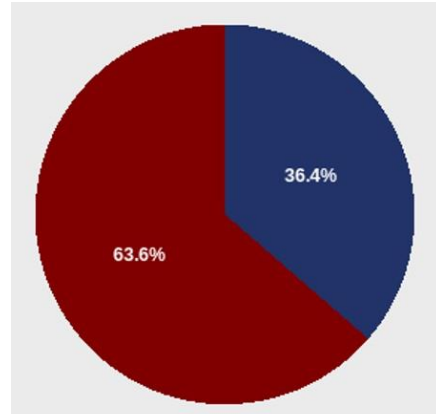
# Job Roles Relative to TANF



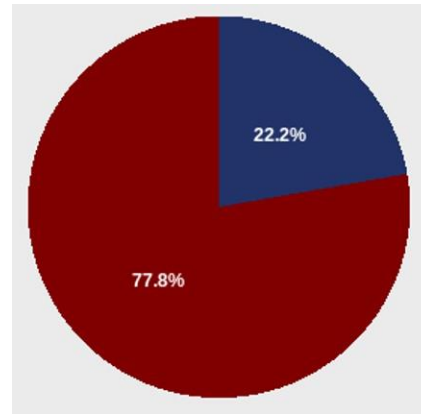
# Role Relative to TANF by Module



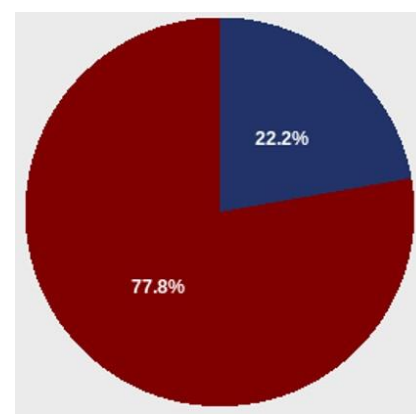
TANF Data Use & Opportunities



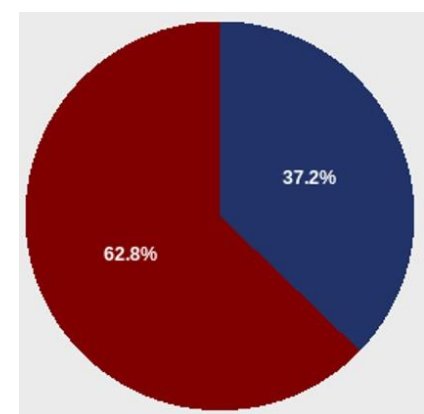
Data Collection & Documentation



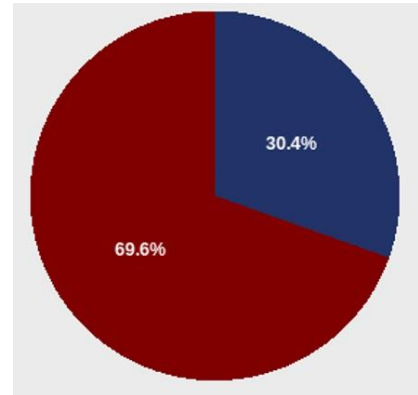
Data Infrastructure



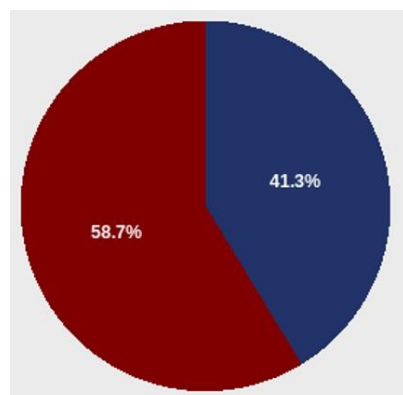
Data Sharing



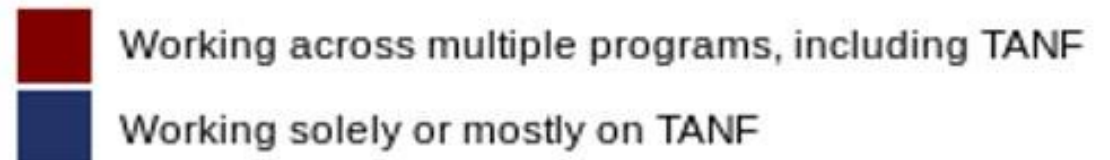
Research & Analytic Capacity



Federal Reporting



Payment Integrity



# Item Response Rates by Module

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TANF Data  
Use &  
Opportunities

**89 – 96%**

Data Sharing

**87 – 98%**

Payment  
Integrity

**67 – 96%**

Data  
Collection &  
Documentation

**94 – 96%**

Research &  
Analytic  
Capacity

**90 – 96%**

Data  
Infrastructure

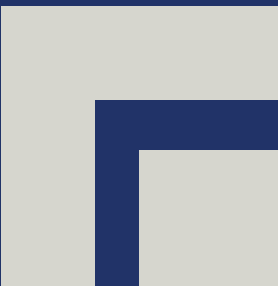
**82 – 92%**

Federal  
Reporting

**76 – 94%**

Thank you!

Contact: [lgjertson@chapinhall.org](mailto:lgjertson@chapinhall.org)





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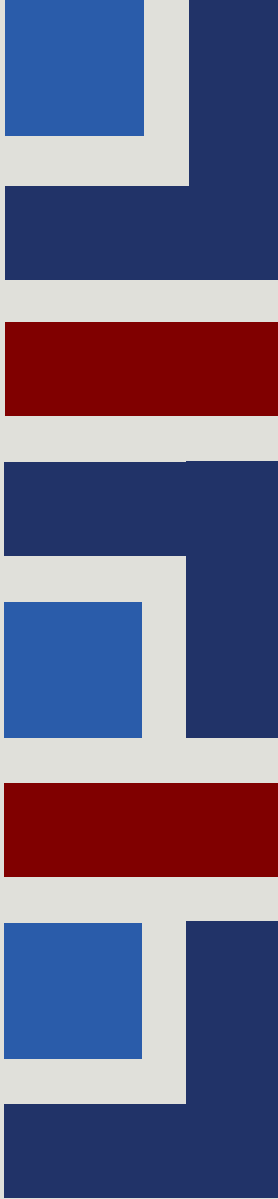
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# TANF Agencies' Access to Data for Research & Analyses

Emily Wiegand

July 29, 2019





# TANF Data Collaborative (TDC)

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# Needs Assessment Analysis Design

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## Results

- Priorities and Goals for Data Use
- Data Access
- Data Sharing and Partnerships
- Current Data Use
- Federal Reporting
- Technical and Analytic Capacity

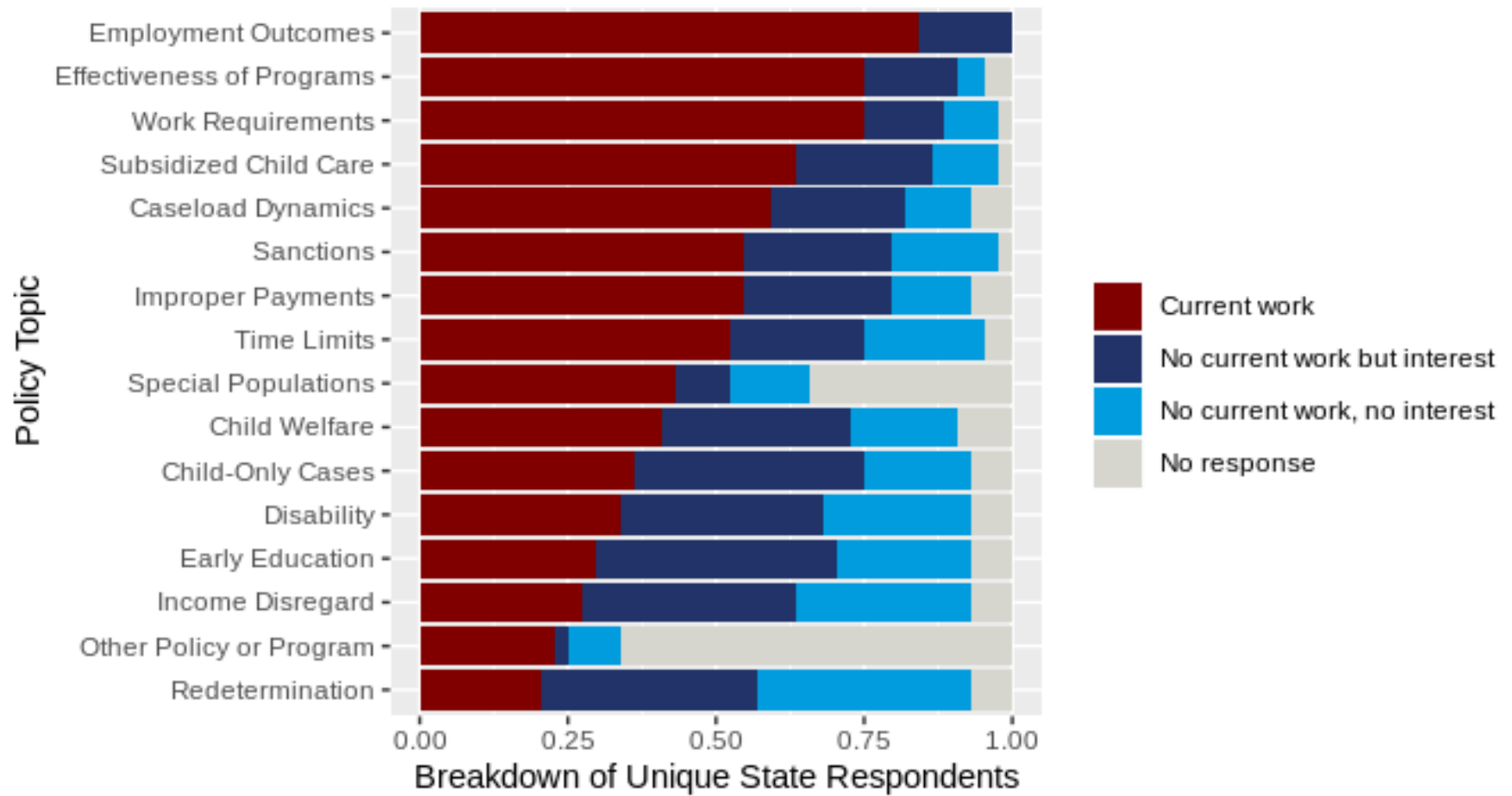
## Synthesis

- Growing TANF Agency Data Use Capacity
- Characterizing Data Use
- TANF Data Use Continuum

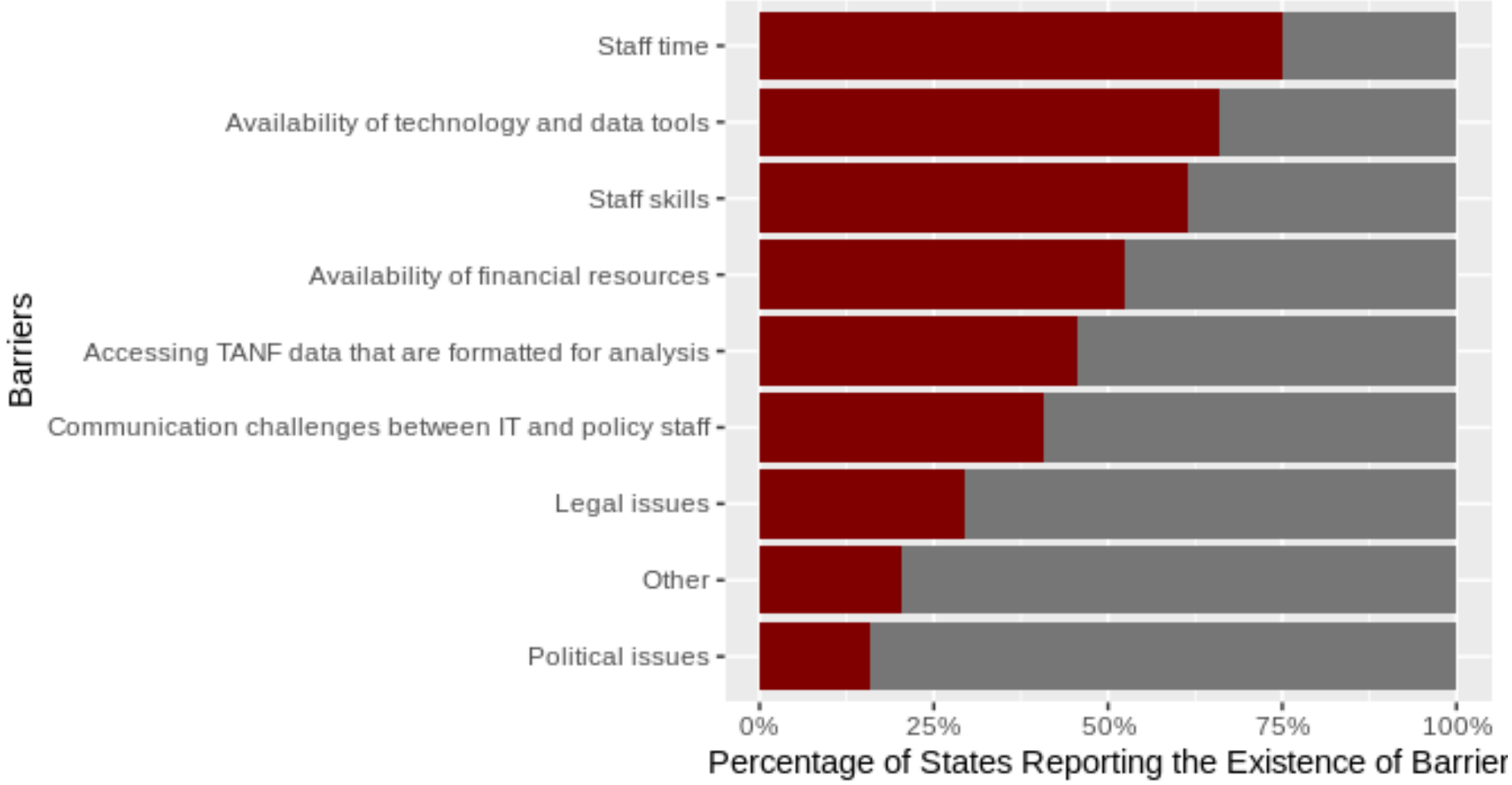
How does data access affect TANF agencies' analytical capacity?



## Areas of Current Analytic Work



# Barriers to Data Use



# Barriers Using Data for Analyses

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## Insufficient staffing and resources

Shortages of staff time and funding for research and analysis activities and related technology.

Difficulty obtaining and managing contractors.

Lack of necessary knowledge and skills for analyzing data.

## Data access and data quality

Technical limitations in ability to access data in formats needed for research (including longitudinal data).

Data that are siloed across agencies, programs, or systems (including both technical and data governance challenges).

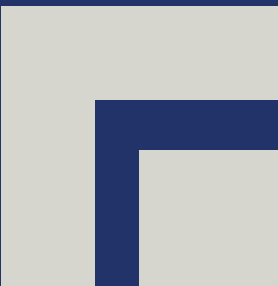
Concerns about data quality including incomplete and inaccurate data.

## Importance of data analysis

Research and data analysis are not valued by agency leadership and decision-makers.

Lack of a shared understanding of the importance of analytics across multiple systems and entities.

What data are in TANF agencies' "primary data systems"?



# “Primary Data System”

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**41** of **43** states have a central data system used by all counties in the state.

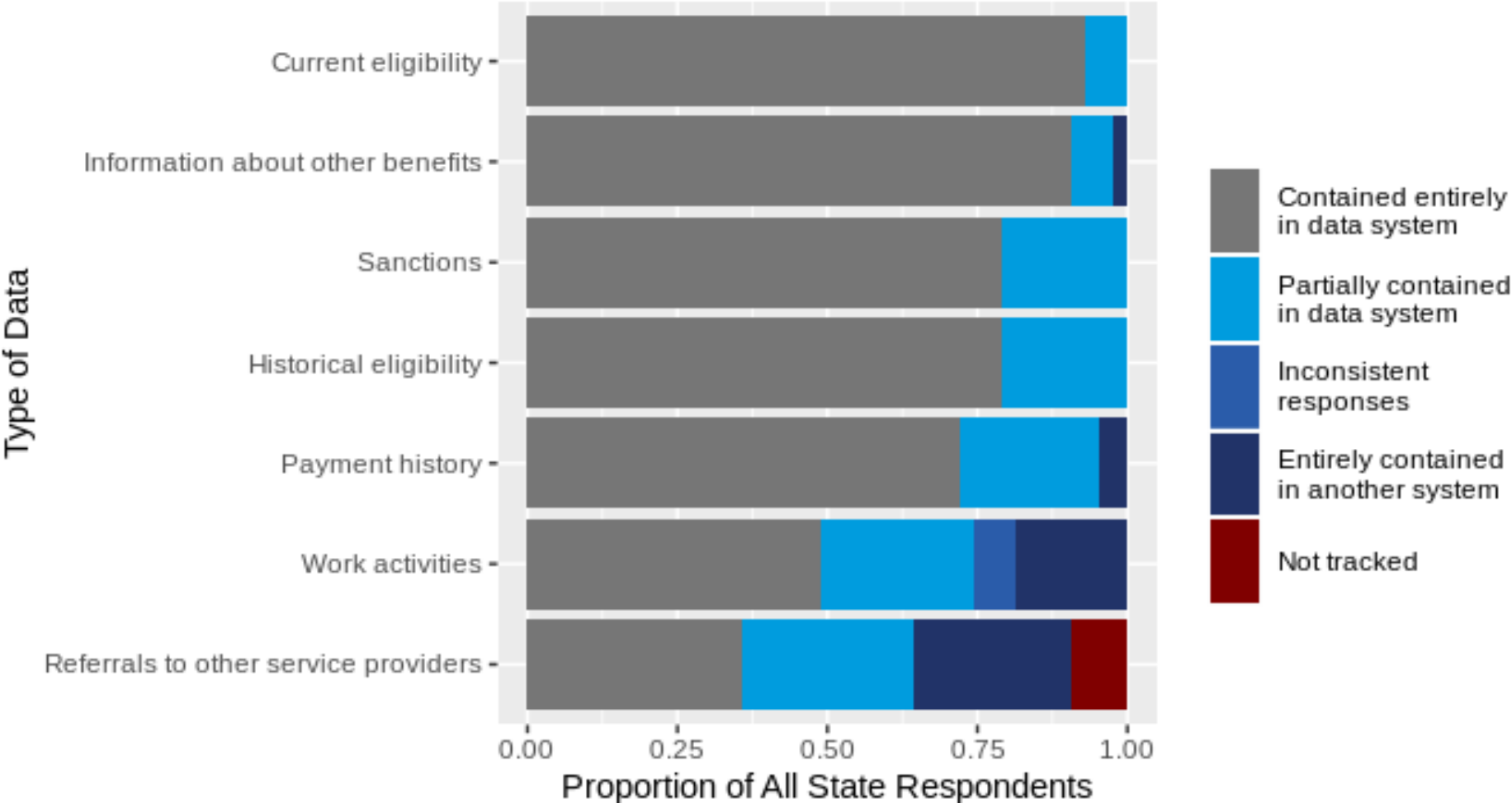
**42** of **43** states have a central data system integrating at least some data from all counties.

**30** of **40** states have at least one other data system that contains TANF program data and is automatically integrated with the primary data system.

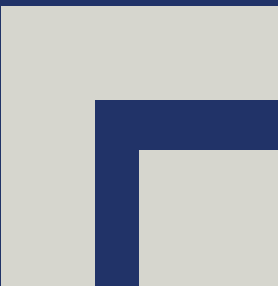
In another **7** states these supplemental systems are manually integrated.



# Data Elements in Primary Data System



How quickly are data available for reporting and analyses, and to what extent are historical data preserved?



# When are data considered “final” and appropriate for analysis?

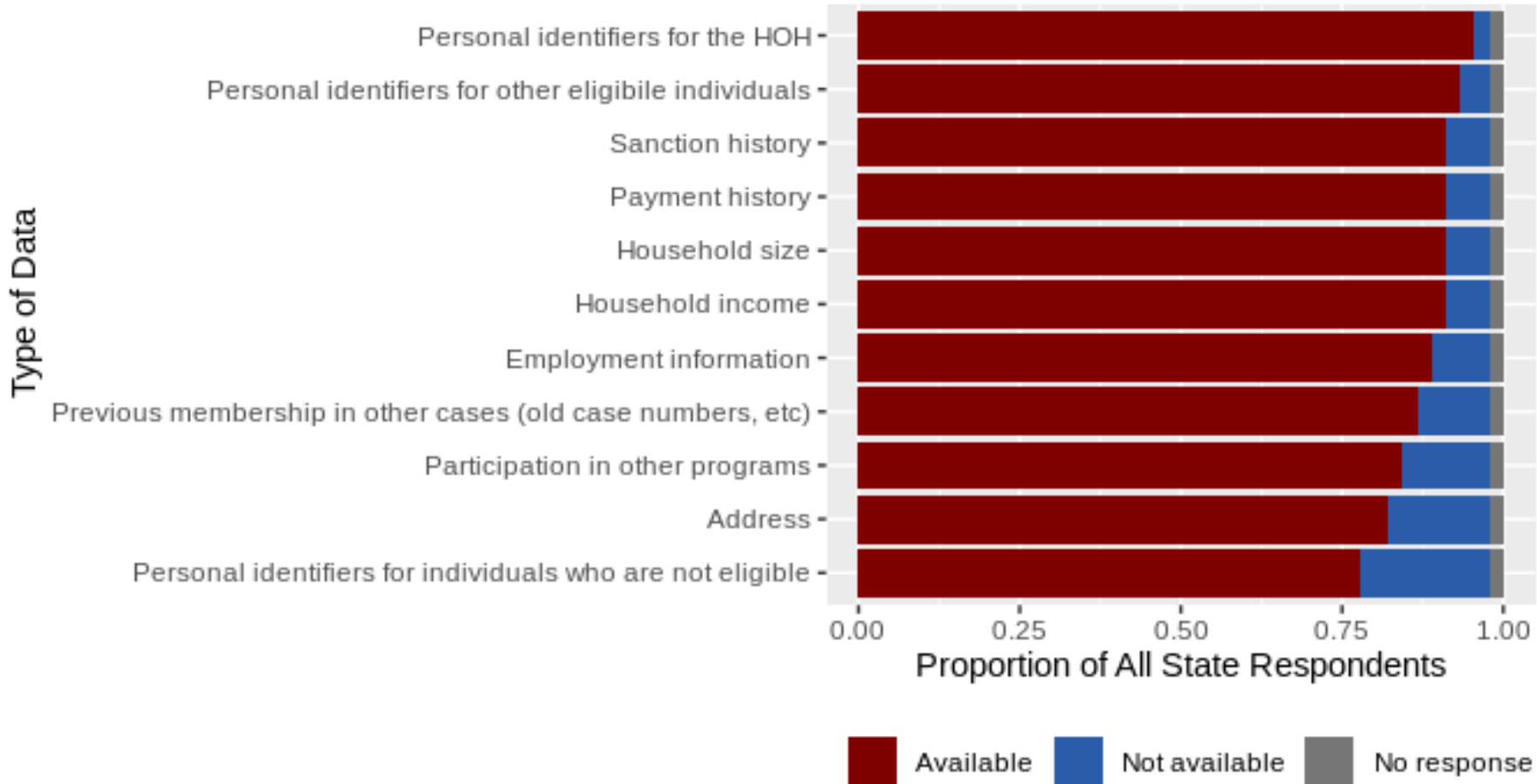
## Payment Data

	Count of States	Percent of States
Final upon entry	12	27.9%
Available in 1 month	19	44.2%
Available in 3 months	11	25.6%
Available after 3 months	1	2.3%

## Eligibility Data

	Count of States	Percent of States
Final upon entry	12	27.9%
Available in 1 month	21	48.8%
Available in 3 months	10	23.3%
Available after 3 months	0	0.0%

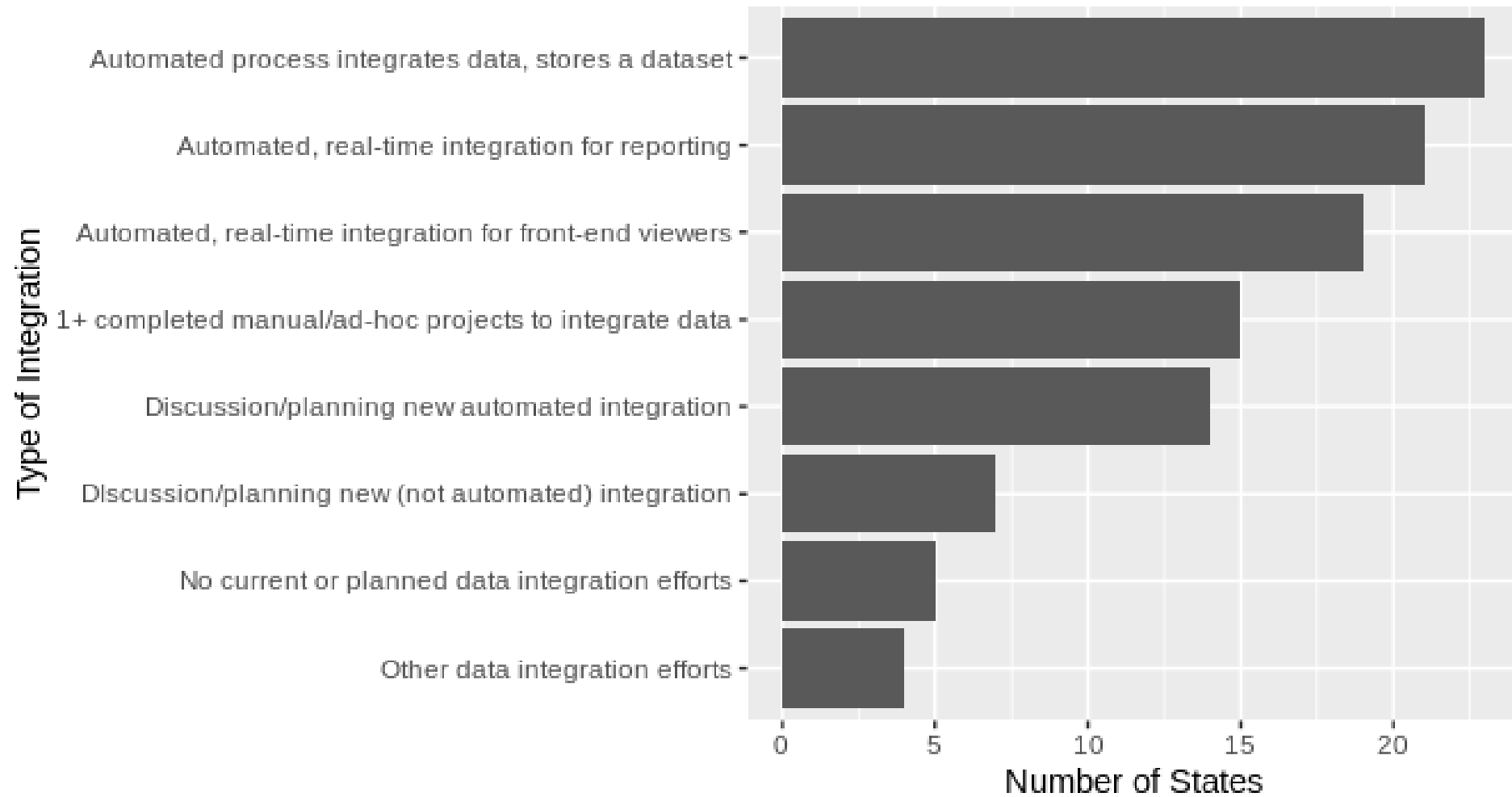
# Availability of Longitudinal Information



What data from other programs or systems are integrated with TANF data for analytic purposes?



## Data Integration with Primary Data System

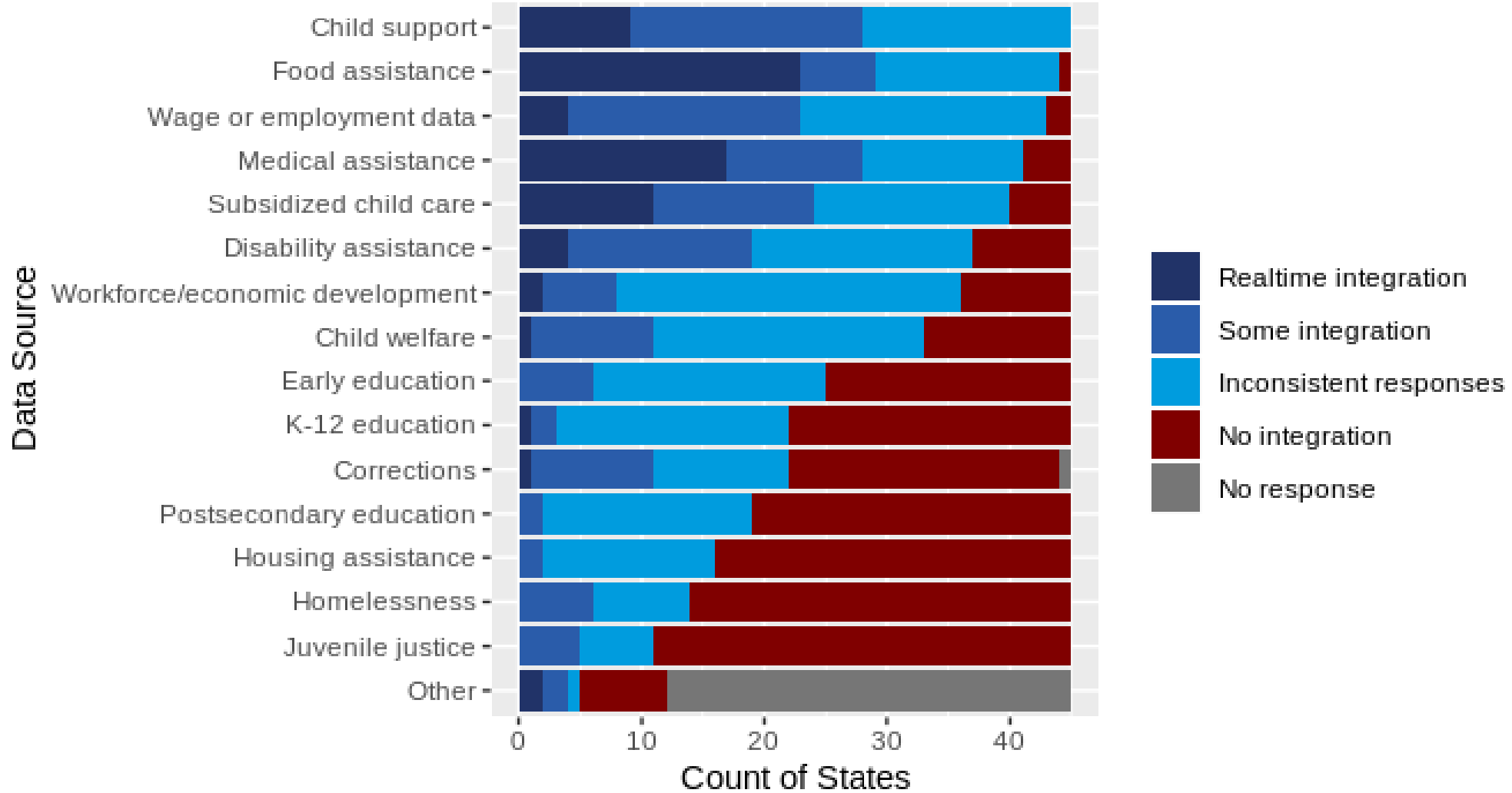


# Survey Questions for Data Integration

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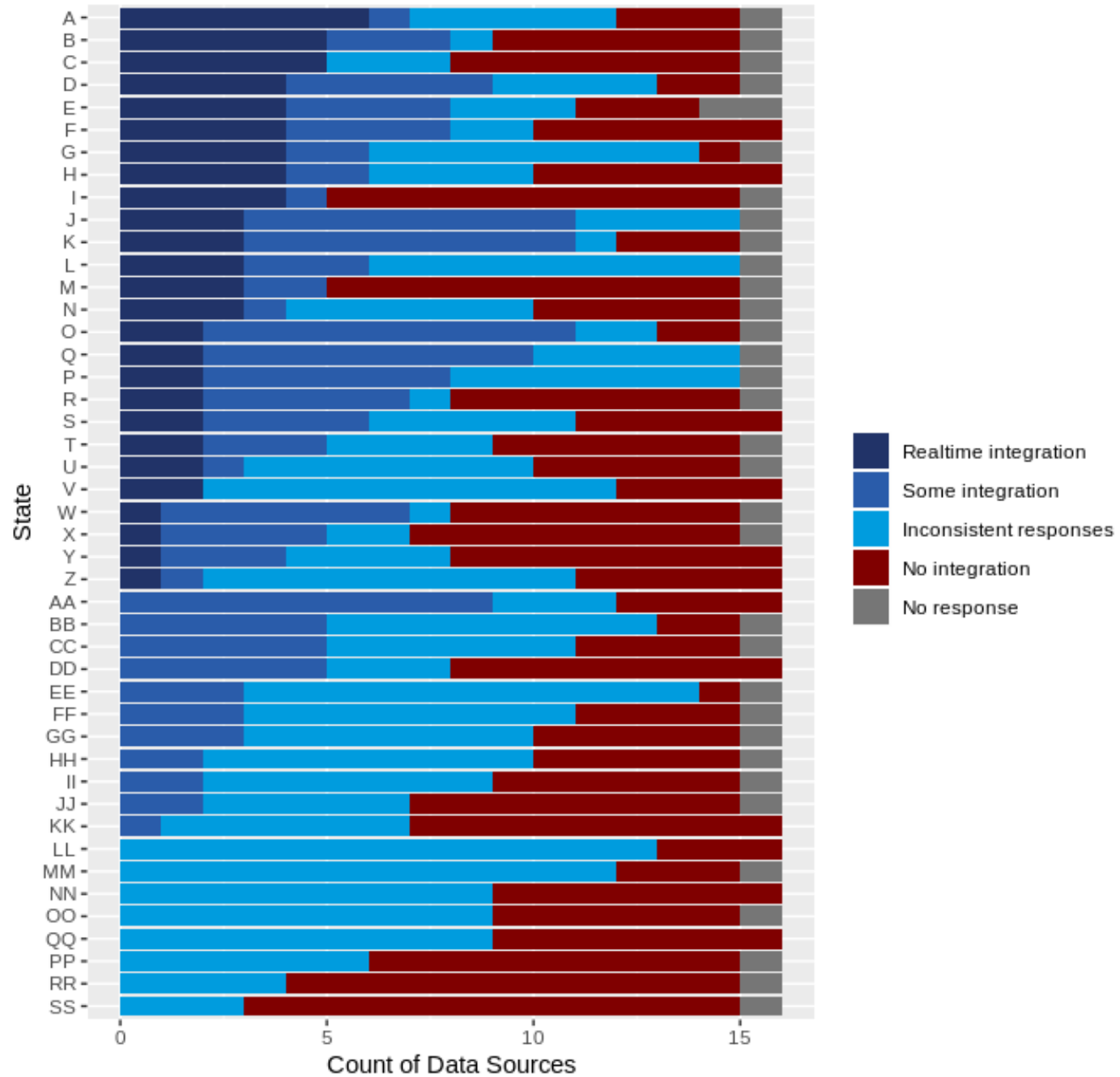
- **Data Collection:** “For each type of information, please indicate the source for that information or if that information is not accessible for TANF program management.”
- **Data Infrastructure:** “Thinking about the above processes of data integration, please characterize the types of data contained in the data systems that are integrated with the primary data system.”
- **Research and Analytic Capacity:** “Which other sources of administrative data are integrated with your primary sources of TANF data (i.e. analysts can report on individuals across multiple data sources)?”

## Integration of Data Sources across All States

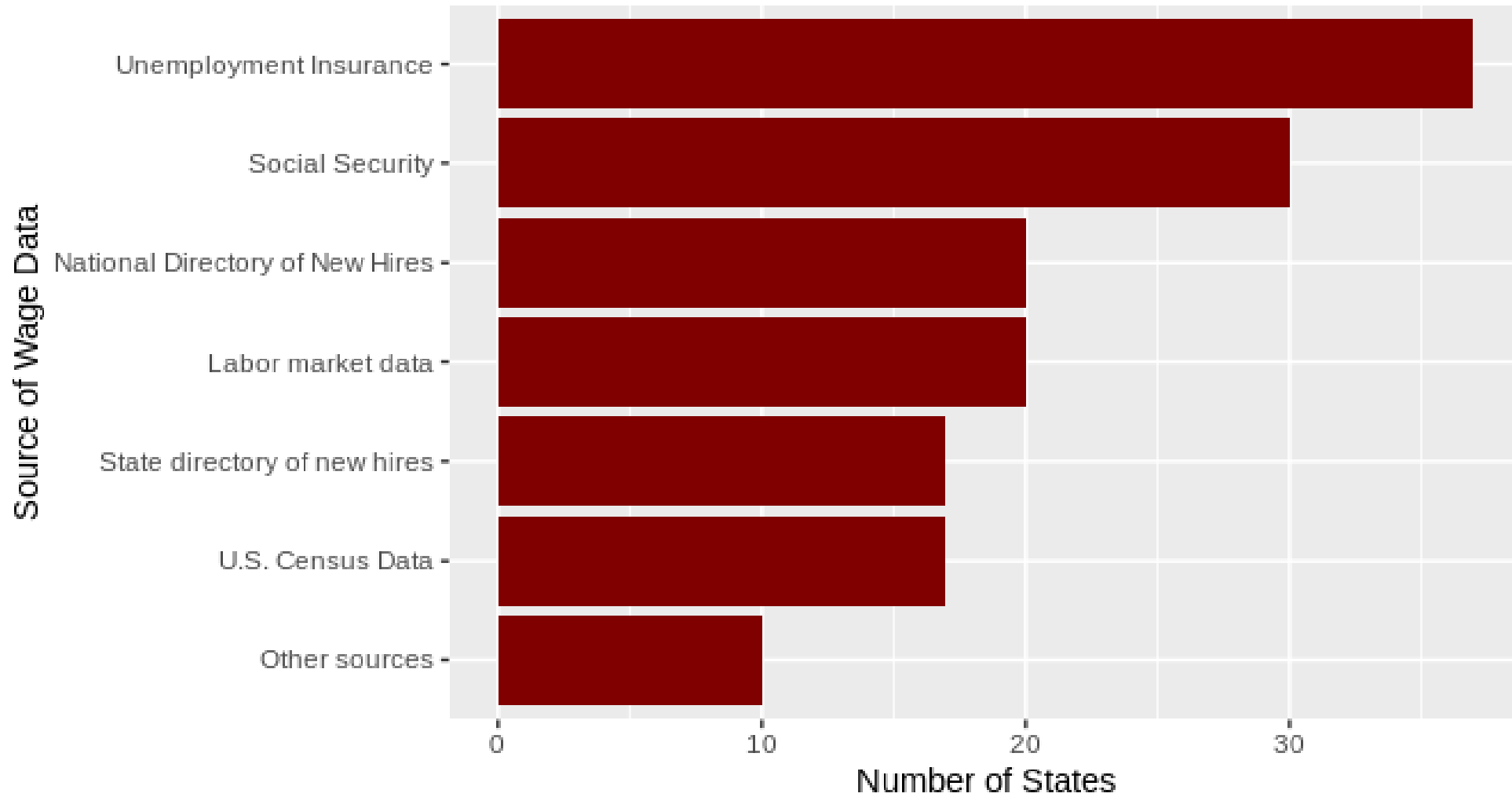




## Number of Data Sources Integrated by State

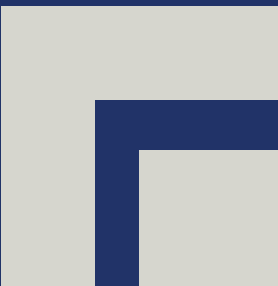


## Sources of Wage Data Used by TANF Agencies



Thank you!

Contact: [ewiegand@chapinhall.org](mailto:ewiegand@chapinhall.org)





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## The national TANF data use landscape: Findings from stakeholder interviews

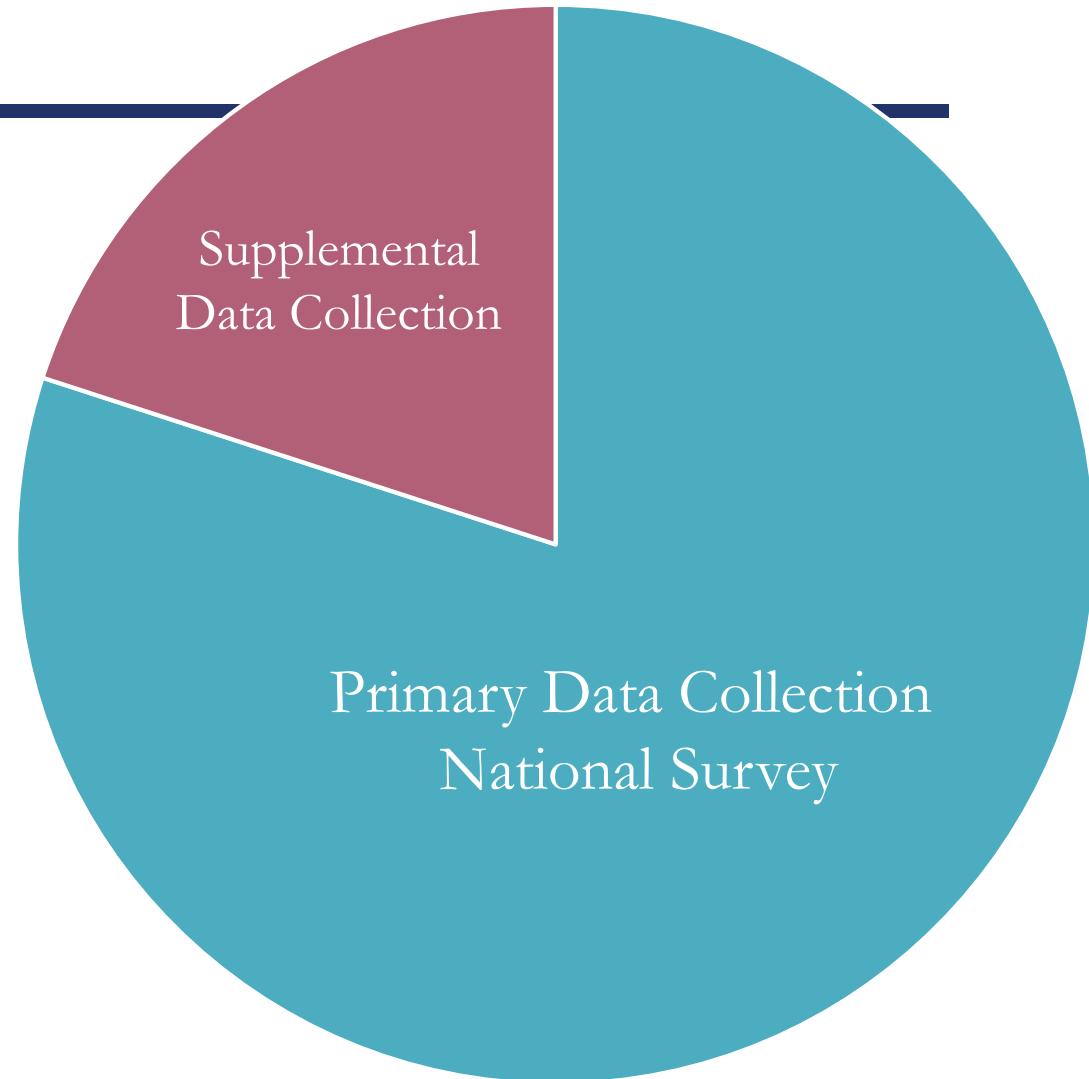
Presented by: Della Jenkins



# TDC Needs Assessment

## Stakeholder Interviews with:

- ✓ Researchers
- ✓ Federal leaders
- ✓ Self-sufficiency orgs
- ✓ State/County Administrators  
(not already surveyed)





# Stakeholder Interviews

# Stakeholder Interviews

Probed similar themes as the survey, including:

- ✓ Policy priorities
- ✓ Common barriers to data use
- ✓ Perceptions of state data needs
- ✓ Feedback on TTA topics
- ✓ Feedback on TTA modes
- ✓ Examples of successes
- ✓ Resources we should know about





# Policy priority #1

## Employment outcomes and program effectiveness

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“There is a lot we could benefit from in knowing what happens after people leave TANF and our knowledge on that is very dated.”

“After 2002, there isn’t a lot on what works and what helps people...

Do they need TANF for just a few months to fill a gap?

To what extent do people need intensive services?

What are they getting for intensive services?

What works? Where do they end up?

... We just don’t have data to answer that right now.”

# Barriers to using TANF data to inform policy & practice

## Capacity/Staff time

- "People don't want to buy in unless there is a sustained financial commitment that won't sacrifice other aspects of their duties"
- "The first priority of every program manager is to make sure they follow the rules and don't get audited and this soaks up a lot of energy and effort. They are not given the time or incentives to think about how the world could be different if we could look across programs and use data to tackle problems not defined in these compliance requirements."

## Siloed Funding Streams, Siloed Data Systems

- "The way we've structured federal programs where dollars flow to a single entity does not foster an environment where state program leaders see value of working on enterprise wide solutions. We need to do more to enable cross-cutting leaders to take long view."

# Barriers to using TANF data to inform policy & practice (continued)

## Data Quality

Range of challenges, including:

- former recipients have no incentive or easy way to report reason for leaving
- important fields are free-form or optional
- front-line staff lack common understanding of terms
- no mechanism for coding two-generation or two-parent families

## Variation Across States Makes it Challenging to Define & Measure Success

- “You can’t do comparisons across states. If you tried to have a single national measure you would end up with a meaningless number.”

# Perceptions of state needs & feedback on TTA Topics:

## Data sharing & integration

- Motivation & leadership-- no legislative requirements or clear instruction to integrate
- Confusing web of state and federal privacy laws
- Fear that people in other agencies won't understand data and will therefore use data in misleading way
- Lack of resources
- Logistics

“The biggest barrier to better data use is risk aversion...There would be a big benefit in building understanding of the trade-off between the value of data sharing for evidence-based policymaking vs. the risk of it (e.g., data breaches & privacy concerns). Staff who are engaged in this haven't had the opportunity to think through what those balances look like or need to look like.”



# Perceptions of state needs & feedback on TTA Topics (continued)

## Formulating research questions

- “Helping agencies ask the right, data-answerable questions should be a high-priority topic. It’s also what will get agencies excited to participate.”

## Data visualization

- “We see a lot of desire for data dashboards and interactive data, which I’d call **data storytelling**. It’s more visually appealing. People are putting out these graphical data stories that they could use help in telling.”

## Staff skill gaps

- “Basic education on data science - what is data science & how you use it – would be helpful for every single person in the agency.”



# Feedback on modes of TTA

## Blend of in-person and online opportunities, including “microlearning”

- “We would strongly encouraging the use of modes of TA that take into account peoples’ limited attention spans and time, such as videos, podcasts, and other on-demand learning tools.”

## Peer-to-peer learning & case studies

- “The way to [convince program managers that using data is useful to them] is to have good examples that are fresh, new & relevant for whatever the context is. Try not to use the same old examples that are always used.”

## Data Tools

- “I would *pay* for code notebooks”



# Other feedback

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## Importance of Leadership Buy-in When it Comes to Data Sharing:

### A. Build Trust

“There’s turf warfare across agencies and lack of trust. They’re wondering: ‘How will other agencies use my agency’s data? Will I get in trouble for what you find?’”

### B. Combat Fear

“Not all agencies are confident about laws/regulations set forth to govern their data. They need training to make their policies more clear and to help create less fear. Federal agencies and initiatives can really help by being more proactive, providing training, making the info more available, and not waiting for agencies to contact them about policies and regulations around data sharing.”



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# TANF DATA COLLABORATIVE

TDC supports  
TANF agency  
efforts to:



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## The purpose of the TDC pilots is to...

...plan and implement a multi-year project or projects that leverages **administrative data** (particularly employment data) to inform **program improvement**

...promote **sustained data use** and to encourage a culture of **evidence-based decision making**

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## Benefits to being a TDC Pilot:



Direct funding



Targeted and hands-on training and  
Technical Assistance



One-on-One support from TANF and  
data analytic experts



Peer Learning Opportunities

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# TDC Pilot Nomination Timeline



Mark your calendars!

Starting **July 1<sup>st</sup>**, 2019 go to <https://tanfdata.org> for more information

Submit questions  
by **August 15<sup>th</sup>**

Submit nominations  
by **September 30<sup>th</sup>**

Pilots selected by  
**November 30<sup>th</sup>**



## TDC Website

- ✓ Visit [tanfdata.org](https://tanfdata.org)
- ✓ Join the Collaborative to get on TDC mailing list
- ✓ Email questions to [info@tanfdata.org](mailto:info@tanfdata.org)



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