*Many Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) grantees are serving participants through leveraged federal resources. To support these efforts, a series of technical assistance (TA) resources are being released to SWFI grantees to provide information on these resources’ eligibility requirements for the major federal programs with which SWFI participants are likely to engage. This tip sheet focuses on eligibility requirements for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Subsequent tip sheets will focus on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF).*

*Complex eligibility requirements for leveraged federal programs can contribute to SWFI enrollment challenges and complicate the work of participants, case managers, and program designers in helping participants access appropriate services. Understanding a participant’s eligibility can open up funding streams, increase access to supportive services while a participant receives training or works, and ensure greater stability for families. Since state guidelines can differ from federal guidelines, SWFI grantees should use these tip sheets to identify where program eligibility requirements diverge in their states.*

TANF eligibility requirements tip sheet \_

This tip sheet focuses on TANF eligibility standards. It’s important to note that determining eligibility for TANF is separate from and in addition to determining an individual’s eligibility to participate in the SWFI program. All participants served must meet SWFI eligibility requirements, as determined by the SWFI Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) and your project’s grant statement of work.

When determining eligibility for SWFI participants to receive other federal resources, grantees should consider the following questions when reviewing state rules and how those may differ from federal policies:

* Is there a state or centralized clearinghouse that can provide clear information about how the state’s eligibility standards differ from federal standards for TANF?
* Are there other programs in the state that are particularly relevant for SWFI participants? (For example, families under 130 percent of the poverty line may qualify for Early Head Start and Head Start).
* Do any particular challenges arise from the state’s eligibility standards? Are any notable populations of SWFI participants eligible for one program and not the other?
* Do state rules create any flexibility in navigating federal eligibility challenges?

Tips for navigating TANF eligibility

| **TANF Cash Assistance** | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category of Eligibility Standard** | **Federal Eligibility Standard** | **Details and State-by-State Differences** |
| **Members of household** | Families with a dependent child (under age 18, or age 18 if enrolled in secondary school)  (see <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43634.pdf> for further information) | Note that there are child-only TANF cases, but this is not applicable for SWFI participants. |
|  | Ineligible household members can include adults who have received assistance for >60 months, teen parents in unsupervised settings, felons and parole violators, teen parents not in high school after child is >13 weeks, families that have not turned over rights to child support to the state, certain noncitizens | States may use funds countable toward the TANF maintenance of effort (MOE) state spending requirement to assist these groups. |
| **Income** | There is no federal standard of income threshold; states decide what their standards are for determining need.  (see <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43634.pdf>) | Review your state’s threshold, as maximum monthly income standards ranged from 16% of poverty-level income in Alabama to 115% of the federal poverty line in Wisconsin. |
|  | For families already participating, there is no federal standard for how to consider new employment-related income in calculating benefits.  (see <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43634.pdf>) | If a new income source emerges during benefit receipt, some states disregard those earnings, whereas others gradually ramp down benefits. This policy may be called “earnings disregard”. |
| **Assets** | For families seeking new eligibility, there is no federal standard for allowable assets.  (see <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43634.pdf>) | Most states have asset limits, but some now base eligibility solely on income. Pay attention to whether your state includes or disregards the partial or full value of vehicles against asset limits. |
| **Eligibility conflicts and coordination with other programs** | Families receiving TANF cash assistance are automatically financially eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).  (see <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43634.pdf>) | A family’s TANF income may be counted in determining total benefits from SNAP. |
| **Time limits** | The federal time limit is 60 months, but states can exceed 60 months for up to 20% of the caseload.  (see <https://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-an-introduction-to-tanf>) | Time limits vary by state. |
| **Immigration status** | States cannot use federal TANF dollars to assist legal immigrants unless they have been in the country for longer than 60 months. TANF cannot be used for undocumented immigrants. In addition to cash assistance, this applies to TANF-funded programs like work supports, child care, job training, and transportation.  (see <https://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-an-introduction-to-tanf>) |  |
| **Work requirements** | A work-eligible individual must engage in a work activity for at least 30 hours a week (20 hours a week for single parents with children under 6).  Most of the core work activities (see below) can count toward any participation hour requirements, but the three non-core categories can count only if the participant also engages in core activities for at least 20 hours a week (30 hours for two-parent families).  (see <https://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-an-introduction-to-tanf>)  Core work activities include:   * Unsubsidized employment * Subsidized private-sector employment * Subsidized public-sector employment * Work experience * On-the-job training * Job search and job readiness assistance * Community service programs * Vocational educational training (for up to 12 months) * Providing child care services to an individual who is participating in a community service program   The three non-core activities are:   * Job skills training directly related to employment * Education directly related to employment * Satisfactory attendance at secondary school or in a course of study leading to a GED | States may implement additional exemptions in defining work eligible individuals, including those with documented physical or mental health conditions.  States may offer additional work activities.  (see [www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/engagement_and_zero_hours_report_12_19_14.pdf)  [opre/engagement\_and\_zero\_hours\_](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/engagement_and_zero_hours_report_12_19_14.pdf)  [report\_12\_19\_14.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/engagement_and_zero_hours_report_12_19_14.pdf)) |