

W-2 Program Evaluation

Phase 1 Recommendations Report



Executive Summary

Wisconsin's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, Wisconsin Works (W-2), has operated with the same provider network since 2012 despite numerous modifications to service contracts. In preparation for a broader re-procurement in 2024, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) initiated a three-phase collaboration with Social Finance. In January 2023, the first phase of this engagement began with an assessment of the current program. This assessment is the first evaluation of the W-2 program in relation to state administration and contract service delivery during its 27-year history. It included over 70 hours of interviews with program stakeholders and W-2 participants, an examination of TANF programs in other states, and an analysis of program data to develop new performance-based contracting strategies.

Currently, the program is not meeting its potential to aid participants and their families. Although the program has successfully provided meaningful assistance in some cases, connecting participants with resources that helped them secure and retain employment, the program often falls short in delivering consistent, effective support. The findings summarized in this report outline a series of recommendations aimed at improving the program in the upcoming contract period. Their collective intention is to transform W-2 into a program committed to assisting participants in surmounting challenges related to employment, enabling them and their families to attain economic stability.

Key recommendations include:

- **Focusing performance payments and incentives on long-term participant outcomes**, such as earnings growth and long-term job retention, rather than the short-term metrics, such as payments for job attainment.
- **Incentivizing robust case management** through performance-based payments that reward specific case management process measures, supported by strong program oversight (i.e., through Monitoring), to drive whole-family service delivery approaches.
- **Changing agency budgeting practices to ensure participants can access all program benefits**, especially emergency payments, and include direct performance payment to participants.
- **Standardizing use of high-value non-monetary participant benefits**, such as a "stabilization period" to help participants prepare for beginning their activity plans.
- **Empowering participant families by gathering and acting on their feedback**, which could be collected by agencies after service visits or at regular intervals (every six months) and create structures like participant advisory boards to surface concerns and inform key program policies.
- **Requiring or incentivizing agencies to build partnerships for access to more services** when W-2 agencies cannot provide all the services necessary for a participant to start work. For example, Community Action Programs, behavioral health providers, and technical colleges all complement W-2's core model and help drive participant economic success.

A more detailed table of recommendations follows the Executive Summary.

Several of the program's constraints, such as the cap on the monthly cash grant and the extensive documentation required for eligibility, are consequences of state and federal laws that will continue to apply in the forthcoming contract period. We focused instead on actionable enhancements that could be achieved through:

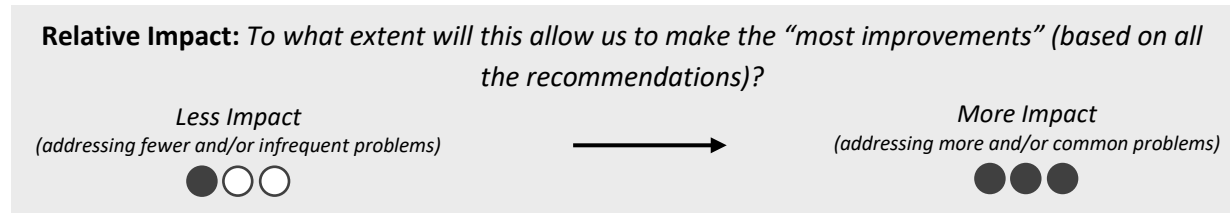
- **2024 re-procurement:** The coming re-procurement allows DCF to set a broad vision for the W-2 service program and expectations for how it will compensate providers. The RFP can offer responding bidders a chance to propose how they will meet the mandate of whole-family service delivery. It also opens the door for new providers whose missions support DCF's service goals.
- **New contracts:** Contracts will allow DCF to set more specific service terms with selected providers, including expected performance targets and performance payment terms.
- **Administrative authority:** DCF has substantial authority to regulate W-2, and the assessment points to actions DCF can take within the scope of its regulatory authority to enhance whole-family service delivery approaches, like requiring agencies to secure and report participant feedback in directive ways.
- **Ongoing performance management:** After contracts are executed, DCF can rapidly and proactively provide feedback to agencies using program performance data. A stronger performance management structure will help DCF reinforce program goals through ongoing direct communication about provider performance, and help agencies improve faster.

The recommendations specified below, taken in their entirety, represent significant change, and may challenge DCF's operational capacity. Similarly, they may dissuade some providers from participating in the re-procurement process, especially in the absence of clear commitment from DCF to reduce existing program compliance burdens. However, by prioritizing and sequencing strategies highlighted in this assessment, DCF can fundamentally alter the way participants and their families interact with the W-2 program and accelerate their economic mobility.

Following DCF's evaluation of these recommendations, we will support the Department's efforts to prepare for the 2024 system re-procurement. We are grateful to DCF and the state's W-2 stakeholders for their ongoing collaboration, and we are eager to continue the work of reshaping the program to focus on the comprehensive economic well-being of families.

Summary of Phase 1 Key Recommendations:

Detailed in the summary table below, you will find each recommendation and its supporting recommendations, as well as our indication of the supporting recommendation’s relative impact. We believe all recommendations have benefits but have provided this relative impact guidance to note recommendations that focus on addressing program challenges more frequently noted in interviews or challenges that reflected broader systemic challenges, compared to those recommendations that may address a more narrow or less commonly identified set of program challenges.



Recommendation	Supporting Recommendation	Relative Impact
1. <u>Incentives / Funding:</u> Adjust incentive structure to reward quality case management and longer-term, participant-focused outcomes.	1.A Incentivize long-term, rather than short-term, metrics in the performance payment structure.	● ● ●
	1.B Include case management metrics in the performance incentive structure.	● ● ●
	1.C Adjust W-2 agency budgeting to reduce perverse incentives that limit use of direct supports for participants.	● ● ●
	1.D Implement a scorecard to drive high performance on positive whole-family outcomes.	● ● ●
	1.E Prioritize metrics that directly measure outcomes for participant families and support continuous improvement of service delivery.	● ● ●
	1.F Shorten the contract period.	● ● ○
2. <u>Staff Training:</u> Expand the content covered within new worker training to address gaps in case management skills.	2.A Update DCF’s new worker training to focus on development of case management skills across an extended timeline.	● ● ○
	2.B Engage and support caseworkers in the process of continuously improving new hire training.	● ○ ○

<p>3. <u>DCF Process / Support:</u> Make participant-focused updates to how the program and its benefits are communicated.</p>	<p>3.A Create participant-facing materials that are clear about W-2 program benefits.</p>	<p>●○○</p>
	<p>3.B Establish a process for agencies to clarify key policies that impact person-centered service delivery.</p>	<p>●○○</p>
	<p>3.C Rebrand W-2, focusing on strategies to change messaging and attitudes among W-2 agency leadership and staff.</p>	<p>●●○</p>
<p>4. <u>Administrative Burden:</u> Adjust program policies to ease administrative burdens connected to enrollment and activity planning.</p>	<p>4.A Add a “stabilization period” to the early participation process to address barriers prior to beginning work activities.</p>	<p>●●●</p>
	<p>4.B Provide guidance that allows participants to more easily pursue education programs at technical colleges.</p>	<p>●●○</p>
	<p>4.C Streamline W-2 placement and activity codes.</p>	<p>●○○</p>
<p>5. <u>W-2 Agency Process:</u> Require agencies to adopt processes that ensure consistent, purposeful communication with participants.</p>	<p>5.A Reinforce the need for caseworkers to connect with and respond to participants on a frequent, timely basis.</p>	<p>●●●</p>
	<p>5.B Direct caseworkers to project person-centered support throughout intake and ongoing participation in the program.</p>	<p>●●●</p>
<p>6. <u>Community Partnerships:</u> Develop partnerships across social service organizations and departments for more comprehensive whole-family service delivery.</p>	<p>6.A Require agencies to build deep relationships and coordinate efforts with community partners, like Community Action Agencies, who can enhance services for participant families.</p>	<p>●●○</p>
	<p>6.B Strengthen alignment with other government agencies and programs.</p>	<p>●●○</p>
	<p>6.C Partner with child welfare services to provide coordinated support to families who may be navigating two systems.</p>	<p>●●○</p>

<p>7. <u>Case Management / Practice:</u> Improve the interactions that caseworkers have with their clients.</p>	<p>7.A Set requirements that drive greater case coordination between W-2 agencies and other service providers.</p>	<p>● ● ○</p>
	<p>7.B Require agencies to specialize staff or hire people with skills that could meaningfully support participants in key service dimensions, like mental health.</p>	<p>● ● ○</p>
	<p>7.C Use case management reviews to improve agency and caseworker performance and to reward exceptional casework.</p>	<p>● ● ●</p>
	<p>7.D Centralize oversight at DCF to more effectively monitor W-2 agency activity.</p>	<p>● ● ○</p>
<p>8. <u>Participant Empowerment:</u> Collect participant feedback regularly and use it to drive program improvements.</p>	<p>8.A Increase awareness and availability of participant feedback opportunities.</p>	<p>● ● ○</p>
	<p>8.B Broaden the channels of information that participants can use to get information about W-2.</p>	<p>● ● ○</p>
	<p>8.C Provide avenues for participants to change agencies.</p>	<p>● ○ ○</p>
	<p>8.D Involve participants in community steering committees.</p>	<p>● ○ ○</p>
<p>9. <u>Supportive Systems:</u> Prioritize changes to data infrastructure that would reduce barriers to supporting participants and understanding program impact.</p>	<p>9.A Align systems to collect information on service delivery and whole family metrics.</p>	<p>● ● ●</p>
	<p>9.B Integrate existing systems to support delivery of quality case management.</p>	<p>● ● ●</p>
	<p>9.C Facilitate transparency and shared ownership of performance data.</p>	<p>● ● ●</p>

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Background

In 2023, Social Finance began advising the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) on how to use a coming re-procurement of the contractors for its Wisconsin Works (W-2) program to support more positive, durable outcomes for the program’s participant families.

Following a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP), Social Finance was awarded a contract to support DCF through the re-procurement process. To maximize the effectiveness of the upcoming W-2 procurement, our work began with a top-to-bottom assessment of how the W-2 program operates today. The scope of the assessment was broad, as DCF did not place any upfront limits on where to look at the program’s functions in the interest of delivering an honest, unclouded review of the W-2 operations.

Today, DCF contracts with eight agencies across ten catchment areas to administer W-2. As the governing authority for the W-2 program, DCF oversees this system and maintains contracts with all eight W-2 agencies. The agencies handle the program’s daily operations, from determining eligibility to administering core services post-enrollment.¹

The last W-2 agency procurement took place in 2012. Although contracts between W-2 agencies and DCF have undergone numerous changes since then, the upcoming W-2 re-procurement in 2024 presents DCF with an opportunity to make substantial improvements in the quality of the services delivered by W-2 and the culture shaping how DCF and W-2 agencies approach the program.

New W-2 providers entering the system have the opportunity to articulate program strategies that better align with DCF’s vision for whole-family service delivery. At the same time, current agencies can articulate how they can build on their existing strategies to mitigate participants’ work-related barriers and support families in achieving economic mobility.

Guiding Principles:

Through both the RFP process that resulted in our selection and in our initial conversations with DCF, we established core project principles (Guiding Principles), which anchored our research during the assessment. These principles enabled us to go deeper into key topics, ensuring the assessment was poised to add the most value in preparing for the 2024 re-procurement.

¹ See Appendix 5: Participant Experience Map for a more detailed overview of services provided by W-2 agencies. In contrast to every other state, W-2 agencies operate both eligibility for the program – determining if someone qualifies for the program’s services and enrolling them in W-2 – and W-2 program services that support participants after they are enrolled.

Guiding Principles:

Category	Principle	Description
DESIGN	Improve Access	Better understand participant barriers to access
	Incorporate Participant Lens	Center the participant in program design and consider holistic program impacts (e.g., family of a participant, not just the individual)
APPROACH	Integrate Performance Data	Use data to identify problems and drive decisions
	Prioritize Incremental Progress	Make incremental progress but document big or “dream” program changes for the future
RESULTS	Incentivize Quality Outcomes	Develop metrics to incentivize providers to focus on quality, long-term participant outcomes
	Change the Program Narrative	Emphasize the impact of sustainable, effective participant outcomes as program changes are made and recognized

- Improve Access:* W-2 serves only a share of potentially eligible families, and DCF indicated that, while the program may not suit everyone that is eligible, they believed more families could benefit from the program than are enrolled today.² We assessed how participants find out about the program, as well as difficulties enrolling in W-2 and of maintaining eligibility. Many individuals who could potentially qualify for the program may have contemplated enrolling but either declined to apply or failed to complete the application. Applications include extensive required documentation and short windows for completing key application steps. Similarly, the process of re-evaluating eligibility can result in a participant leaving the program prior to gaining employment.
- Incorporate Participant Lens:* For W-2 to be successful, its services must be tailored to the participants’ specific needs. Participants cannot maintain employment without stable housing and cannot come to work if they do not have childcare. But to understand and help participants overcome challenges to continued participation in the program, service providers need to have the time and encouragement to understand participant experiences and plan with them to overcome barriers to work. In this assessment, we considered strategies for incorporating participant voices and analyzing participant journeys through W-2. Additionally, we considered ways for DCF to prioritize participant perspectives in the upcoming contract period.
- Integrate Performance Data:* We agreed on the importance of using program data to support the assessment, focusing on past program performance data, budget data, and external data from others states to benchmark W-2 against similar programs. DCF discussed the limits of some past program data, noting that the historic focus on the workforce participation rate and other questions of program compliance might limit what these data would tell us about the participant experience or the measurable difference the program made in helping participants gain economic security. They also noted that current systems challenge their ability to collect data about participants’ experience, such as the instances and methods by which participants exit the W-2

² While a precise estimate is difficult to determine given program eligibility restrictions, DCF indicated that W-2 caseload represents less than 10 percent of those eligible in any given month.

application process. Nonetheless, we sought insights from any data made available, and used it to supplement the research we gathered through other sources. We also considered what the available data lacked, in order to plan for building the performance management system in the next contract period.

- *Prioritize Incremental Progress:* Federal and state laws set many of the terms for how W-2 operates, and the upcoming 2024 re-procurement and subsequent agency contracts must remain compliant. Rather than focusing on these limits, we focused on the opportunities available within the re-procurement process, any barriers to the administration of new performance-based W-2 agency contracts, and operational changes DCF should undertake to advance newly implemented service goals.
- *Incentivize Quality Outcomes:* DCF uses a performance-based payment structure in which about 50 percent of W-2 agencies' current-year budgets are paid upon achieving pre-determined metrics. However, DCF indicated that the current performance-based payment system may not be motivating the right outcomes or adding value for participants in the W-2 program. Through the assessment we focused on where the incentive structure did not align with DCF's goals for the program, and we proposed changes that would link performance payments to better participant outcomes or service delivery improvements.
- *Change the Program Narrative:* The culture around W-2 is limiting the program's effectiveness. Preconceived notions about what participants want from the program affect both state staff and W-2 providers and may hinder the implementation of service delivery approaches designed to understand the full range of participant families' needs. We aimed to understand how the 2024 procurement can steer these attitudes toward more "service-oriented" program, emphasizing how W-2 can be a powerful tool to connect participants with quality jobs that will help them join and stay in the workforce.

The goal is for W-2 agencies to orient services around their participants, supported by a performance-based structure that rewards providers when W-2 services are truly making a difference in participant families' lives.

Assessment Approach

Our assessment research was organized into two stages: a review of the current W-2 system, and translating that review into recommendations.

W-2 System Review

First, we built a picture of how W-2 operates today, focusing on what stakeholders and data indicate are the biggest challenges to helping participants connect with meaningful employment opportunities. For this comprehensive insight into the program, we used the following sources of data:

- *W-2 Legal Research and Program Policy:* Our research began with the state laws that established the W-2 program, and we incorporated research on the federal laws, regulations, and guidance set by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). We also delved into the W-2 Policy Manual, DCF's comprehensive guide on delivering W-2 services, as well as existing W-2 agency contracts with DCF.
- *Interviews with W-2 Stakeholders:* We conducted 64 interviews spanning 76 hours, detailed in Appendix 3. These interviews included:
 - DCF staff, including Bureau of Working Families (BWF) program leaders, policy and budget staff, and program implementation staff; Bureau of Analytics and Research leadership and staff; and DCF divisional leadership.
 - Current and former W-2 program participants, both through conversations facilitated by current W-2 agencies and others facilitated separately through DCF.
 - Leadership at all eight agencies that currently provide W-2 services, and direct conversations with non-leadership program staff at some W-2 agencies.
 - Former state W-2 program leaders and former W-2 agency leaders, attorneys for participants, and other advocates with significant knowledge of the W-2 program and/or services for potential W-2 participants.
- *History of the Program and Prior Program Studies:* Beyond what we learned in interviews, we sought secondary research on the program's history, like local and national reporting on the program. This research helped us to understand popular perceptions of the program, including its shortcomings.
- *Program Data Analysis:* We analyzed data provided by DCF on program operations, participant satisfaction, performance outcome payments, and W-2 agency budgets. We supplemented this data with other sources of publicly available data on Wisconsin's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, including data provided by ACF. We sought information from organizations who analyze TANF programs nationally and by state, organizations who research poverty reduction strategies through employment, and organizations that research child welfare.

- *Consultation with National TANF Experts and TANF Experts in Other States:* We interviewed national TANF experts from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), and ACF. We brokered conversations with TANF program leaders in states with promising program strategies to consider in Wisconsin. Findings from these conversations are detailed in Appendix 4.

Organizing Assessment Recommendations

As we began developing recommendations, we created research materials that highlighted where the re-procurement could enhance the program’s effectiveness, particularly in elevating the experiences of participant families.

- *Participant Experience Map:* Relying on the perspectives of participants, agencies, and DCF, we created a beginning-to-end view of the program from the participants’ perspective. The Participant Experience Map (see Appendix 5) helped us to clearly identify the points where participant engagement waned, guiding us to target those points for potential contract changes or incentive adjustments.
- *Cross-State Policy Research:* We drew out promising practices employed by TANF programs from other states, specifically seeking program details that bolstered participant family engagement and seemed promising for incorporation through contract modifications (see Appendix 4).
- *W-2 Program Budget Analysis:* We took a close look at the current budgeting structure for TANF agencies, focusing on how structures can better incentivize person-centered service delivery.
- *Program Limitations List:* We compiled a centralized database of the challenges identified during our research. For each challenge listed, we considered possible solutions and assessed whether it could be addressed through re-procurement, contracting, or another avenue DCF could take to affect change (see Appendix 1).

The following recommendations attempt to address recurring challenges, considering the benefits, drawbacks, and limitations of each approach.

Recommendations

The subsequent recommendations are organized into nine categories, representing improvement areas identified through the assessment. Within each main recommendation, we provide detailed supporting recommendations for integration in the re-procurement, subsequent contract negotiations with the selected awardees, or administrative policy change.

We offer these recommendations with a few notes:

- *Fresh Perspectives.* Some of these recommendations address longstanding concerns of DCF. We aimed to infuse an external perspective, with a keen focus on how contracts and policy changes can achieve DCF's desired program goals.
- *A Menu of Options, not a Fixed Blueprint.* We understand the potential operational strains that might arise for DCF and potential providers from implementing all suggestions. It is our commitment to collaborate with DCF in striking a balance – pushing for innovation while being cognizant of the bounds of feasibility in the re-procurement cycle.
- *Benefits and Drawbacks.* Given that certain recommendations would mark a significant departure from how the current system functions, we highlight potential implementation challenges, offering insights into mitigation strategies.
- *Ongoing Learning Process.* Mindful that DCF is operating under constraints – some, like those in the statute, have been focal in our research; other facets we may not fully grasp – we elaborate on our rationale for each recommendation to ensure clarity and to ascertain if any suggestion stems from a misinterpretation of the re-procurement's potential.

Recommendation 1: Adjust incentive structure to reward quality case management and longer-term, participant-focused outcomes.

A consistent theme we heard through interviews is that the current performance payments are not driving whole-family economic mobility and well-being. Improving outcomes through financial incentives is nuanced, and often iterative. However, focusing on long-term outcomes for participant families can help ensure the program is achieving its core goals. In addition, we also propose some improvements to help DCF and W-2 agencies track progress against these goals, as well as strategies for DCF to continuously monitor the implementation of new performance payment outcome targets and evaluate further adaptations.

1.A: Incentivize long-term, rather than short-term, metrics in the performance payment structure.

Currently, performance on measures such as job attainment and short-term job retention can drive up to approximately 40 percent of a W-2 agency's budget. These measures incentivize agencies to place participants in a job and encourage them to continue to hold that job, regardless of the job's quality or its likelihood of translating to a career that can financially support a family. These metrics may also lead W-2 agencies to rely heavily on placements at temporary staffing agencies, which are associated with lower earnings and less stable employment than direct-hire jobs.³ Additionally, we heard from participants that agencies sometimes place W-2 participants in activities they cannot perform due to physical limitations, justice system involvement, or other reasons.

Instead, we recommend DCF track and incentivize measures that are indicators of longer-term participant success for inclusion in performance-based payments, which would drive agencies to remain engaged with participants for longer periods of time and consider their barriers to work more holistically. Total earnings over six to 18 months are likely a better indicator of progress toward long-term economic mobility for participants and their families than short-term job attainment metrics. Current metrics only require that an individual has secured unsubsidized employment, and that employment has lasted at least 31 calendar days without interruption. Significant evidence underscores that simply getting a job is not enough. For a job to be a meaningful tool of poverty reduction, it must provide a living wage and opportunities for earnings growth.⁴ Income, meanwhile, is a direct measure of economic success for adults, and it is directly linked to other positive outcomes: academic achievement, mental well-being, and health.⁵

Prioritizing earnings in contract payment structures would require agencies to be more actively engaged with participants. Interviews suggested that participants are more likely to stay in jobs that are more closely aligned to their career goals and better suited to their personal barriers to work, an observation in tension with performance payments that reward rapid job placement. Focusing on longer-term earnings growth could drive agencies to more rigorously consider placement quality, placement fit, and any

³ MDRC (2015). [Temporary Staffing for the Hard-to-Employ](#).

⁴ Urban Institute (2021). [Access to Jobs Paying a Living Wage](#). Aggregates multiple studies.

⁵ Urban Institute (2021). [Opportunities for Income](#). Aggregates multiple studies.

supports needed to surmount barriers to work. We would also expect agencies to focus on placements in higher-growth industries that offer better chances for upward career movement and earnings growth.

Even though short-term job attainment and retention are not good predictors of economic mobility, long-term employment is an important factor.⁶ Today, performance incentive payments end at six months. To refocus the program on long-term goals, six months could instead be considered a performance *minimum*—focusing on total time (i.e., full quarters) employed, rather than a participant’s tenure with any employer.

Focusing on earnings and longer-term employment metrics may ease some of the challenges to meeting Workforce Participation Rate (WPR) targets, under the theory that prioritizing both would promote job consistency in ways that lift the WPR. While WPR tracking and reporting will remain a key component of W-2’s federal requirements, prioritizing earnings and long-term employment for performance-based payments could prove an effective substitute for payment incentives on WPR itself, while still supporting tracking requirements.

Although shifting metrics may add some uncertainty to performance-based payments, we think adding longer-term metrics is a worthwhile risk to take. To mitigate these risks, we suggest three strategies: 1) limiting the share of compensation to agencies tied to long-term metrics at first and increasing over time, 2) conducting continuous, interim evaluation of participant data on long-term metrics, discussed consistently with agencies and supported by a performance management process oriented toward metric achievement, and 3) establishing a process and timeline for communication of potential changes to the metrics / payments so that agencies have plenty of time to adjust operations accordingly.

1.B: Include case management metrics in the performance incentive structure.

In addition to measuring longer-term participant outcomes, our assessment highlighted the need to incentivize process metrics that support delivery of quality case management. As touched on in other sections, interviews highlighted disparities in participants’ experiences with their caseworkers. Common challenges we heard from participants included being unable to get in touch with their caseworker, receiving assignments from caseworkers that did not support their career attainment (e.g., connections to a job that did not hire participants who had a criminal record), or feeling shamed or judged during interactions with their caseworker. These negative experiences contribute to a poor perception of the program among families with limited financial resources and make it harder for program participants to realize program benefits. Alternatively, some participants we interviewed were genuinely moved when talking about the life-changing support they received from their caseworker. Life-changing support should be a universal goal of the program, and we should work toward making it the norm rather than the exception.

DCF has sought to bring greater focus to case management quality through the distribution of a quarterly customer feedback survey but acknowledged that more can be done to ensure participants are receiving

⁶ [Poverty and What to Do About It](#), American Enterprise Institute.

the help they need. With this in mind, we recommend the inclusion of participant feedback measures and the addition of measures of case management quality to be tied to performance-based payments. These measures could include frequency of interaction between caseworker and client combined with collection of feedback from the participant on quality of the interaction.

The principal goal of building case management services into the performance payment structure is to orient agencies around removing the barriers that keep participant families from achieving self-sufficiency, but doing this will not, by itself, assure service quality or desired service outcomes. Case management process metrics are an important but imperfect proxy for addressing participants' barriers to work. While increasing case management intensity is linked to better service outcomes in social services,⁷ some participants will have more complex service needs than others – and some that may exceed the service capacity of W-2 case managers. Nevertheless, including case management process metrics in the performance payment structure will be an important step in driving agency culture change (as detailed in Recommendation 7.C), setting a clear marker around expectations for agencies, and could be shaped to provide a baseline expectation for agency case management performance, even if agencies need to exceed what this baseline offers to meet participant service needs.

1.C: Adjust W-2 agency budgeting to reduce perverse incentives that limit use of direct supports for participants.

Agencies distribute participant-focused funding inconsistently, partly because participant-focused funding is integrated within the broader service delivery budget. Combined funding generates a conflict: agencies must balance covering operational costs, like staff salaries and administrative expenses, with providing emergency payments to aid participants in areas such as housing stabilization. Participant incentives for completing key enrollment milestones are sourced directly from agency budgets.

We recommend adjusting DCF's approach to budgeting to ensure agencies maximize participant-focused funding. This could be achieved by separating participant-focused funding and putting it into its own pool with restricted uses. We believe this would be particularly helpful with supporting the distribution of emergency payments for eligible participants experiencing an economic hardship, a program benefit that could bolster program participation and remove major barriers to work. Separating participant-focused funding would also encourage agencies to offer more program incentives to participants – a gift card for completing an eligibility milestone in time, for instance. Under the current structure, agencies do offer incentives sporadically, but dedicated participant-focused funding could encourage agencies to be more systematic in their use of these funds.

Requiring the distribution of performance payments to participants and caseworkers, in addition to agencies, is another strategy to drive resource sharing with participants. For example, Workforce Resource Institute currently shares the performance-based payments they receive with both caseworkers

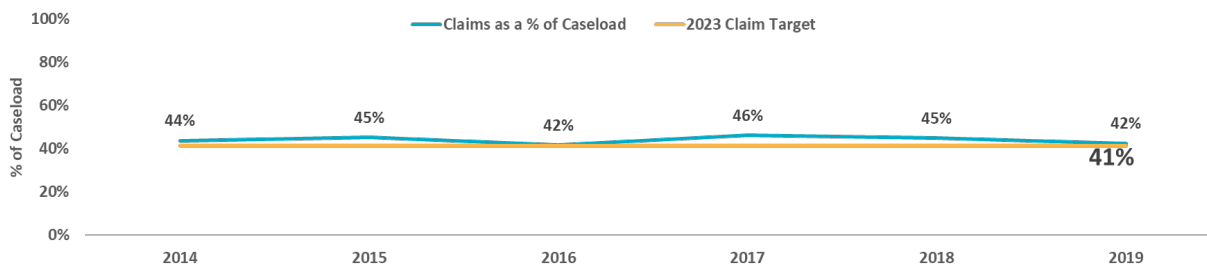
⁷ Department of Labor (2011). Issue Brief – Effective Case Management: Key Elements and Practices from the Field; further studies on TANF-adjacent populations suggest a strong relationship between robust case management and positive service outcomes.

and participants. This approach could provide participants one-time or periodic payments to offset significant unexpected costs like short-term debt or medical expenses.⁸

1.D: Implement a scorecard to drive high performance on positive whole-family outcomes.

Currently, budgeting processes require DCF to set targets for the number of performance-based payment claims they expect agencies to receive. Performance beyond this target is not rewarded by DCF, resulting in agencies consistently performing in line with target expectations. A level of certainty among agencies that they can meet this target diminishes the potential impact of a performance-based contract to drive behavior change through rewards for outperformance.

Performance-Based Payment Claims as a % of Statewide Caseload (2014 – 2019) vs. 2023 Claim Target



DCF has traditionally budgeted this way to maintain year-over-year budget certainty. The state budget process rewards consistency: when an agency does not spend its full allocation in a budget year, the entire program is at risk of budget reductions in future years because states often look to redirect program funding toward other state expenditures when funding goes unused. Further, DCF has no authority to exceed the budget it receives from the state. Therefore, DCF must safeguard against the possibility of W-2 agencies earning performance payments that would obligate DCF to pay more than the available funds in their budget. Instead, we propose replacing the current payment-per-event system with a scorecard based on aggregate performance across metrics and a specified timeframe to allocate incentive funding. Below is a preliminary version of this scorecard shared for illustrative purposes. Social Finance will work with DCF in Phase 2 to finalize details of the structure, scoring, and metrics reflected in the scorecard.

⁸ Performance payments currently range from \$3,625 to \$8,500.

Preliminary Draft Performance Scorecard

Wisconsin Works Agency Performance Scorecard						
1. Report Performance				2. Calculate Score		
Measure	Metric	Sub-Metric	Performance	Point Allocation	Points Awarded	Max Points
Placement (full-time, unsubsidized) / Wages	Portion of caseload that has been placed in a full-time, unsubsidized job, above a certain wage	1a. Wage above \$17	X% of caseload	15	Perf. X Points	15
		1b. Wage between \$15 - \$17	X%	10		
		1c. Wage below \$15	X%	5		
		1d. Placed in part-time job	X%	0		
		1e. Not placed	X%	0		
Job retention rate	Portion of caseload that has retained their job for certain time periods	2a. Over 6 months	X% of caseload	25	Perf. X Points	25
		2b. 3 – 6 months	X%	20		
		2c. 0 – 3 months	X%	15		
		2d. Not placed	X%	0		
W-2 implementation	Portion of caseload that has experienced barrier mitigation	3a. Significant reduction	X% of caseload	30	Perf. X Points	30
		3b. Moderate reduction	X%	15		
		3c. No reduction	X%	0		
		3d. Incomplete barrier data	X%	-10		
Customer satisfaction	Score on customer feedback survey		Survey Score / 100	15	Perf. X Points	15
Customer satisfaction – response rate	Portion of caseload responding to feedback survey		X% of caseload	15	Perf. X Points	15
Total Available Points						100

As shown above, the scorecard would provide a score for each agency, based on its performance across identified priority metrics. Agency scores will then be used to allocate the entire W-2 pool of funding available for performance-based payments across all agencies. This performance-based allocation of funding will allow the highest-performing agency to get the largest performance-based payment (proportional to their contract size), while other lower performing agencies would receive a smaller performance-based payment.

The use of a performance scorecard provides a framework that enables a consistent measurement and tracking process year over year, with some embedded flexibility to prioritize certain metrics at different times. Prioritization of outcomes can be reflected by weighing scores differently for specific metrics. Such adjustments can be made without disruption to DCF’s consistent tracking of metric performance over time, setting up the performance scorecard for use in supporting internal decision-making including contract award and renewal decisions. Additionally, the performance scorecard and supporting reports (as discussed further in Recommendation 1.E) could also be designed to pull new insights into program performance management such as why certain sub-groups within an agency’s caseload are not meeting outcomes.

Additional encouragement to distribute funds to participants may be necessary. DCF could require an agency to fully spend down the participant-focused funding available to them in order to be eligible for a performance-based payment. Agencies found ineligible for a performance-based payment would forfeit their share of the available pool of funding, allowing other eligible and high-performing agencies to receive even larger incentive payments.

This change would result in lower predictability for agencies about performance-based payments. However, it would provide a stronger incentive to achieve performance goals. Social Finance will work

with DCF in Phase 2 to balance the proportion of an agency's budget driven by performance-based payments to ensure agency operations are not put at risk in an underperformance scenario.

1.E: Prioritize metrics that measure outcomes for participant families and support continuous improvement of service delivery.

DCF currently tracks over 60 metrics. These encompass performance measures as well as those necessary for compliance with federal, state, and contractual requirements. State statute mandates tracking five key performance measures for agency contracts: job attainment, job retention, wages, W-2 program implementation, and customer satisfaction. These are the metrics used for Performance Outcome Payments (POPs). During the life of the current 12-year contract, both specific metrics and the proportion of agency funding tied to performance have shifted regularly, making it difficult to track performance on metrics over time and contributing to budget planning challenges for agencies.

Interviews surfaced a significant gap in data collected regarding participants' experience during their time in the program (e.g., how often they connect with caseworkers, what supports or referrals they are receiving, what resources they are using, how they are exiting the program). Additionally, few indicators offer insights into whole-family outcomes. W-2 agencies also expressed uncertainty on how to balance DCF priorities between performance metric tracking and monitoring tracking, even leaving potential incentive funding on the table in part because of the administrative burden necessary to collect payments.

Within the constraints of federal and state compliance, we recommend streamlining the list of metrics collected to 1) focus on meaningful metrics that will be tied to performance-based payments, 2) support the continuous improvement of service delivery and collaborative problem solving, and 3) de-emphasize compliance. We understand that a large portion of the data DCF collects stems from mandatory requirements outside of DCF's control. However, fostering a genuine partnership becomes challenging when the relationship between funders and agencies is primarily punitive. Thus, reducing the number of solely compliance-oriented metrics would communicate an understanding that situations may arise that require accommodations.

As we explore implementation of a performance scorecard, Social Finance will work with DCF in Phase 2 to select and define metrics to be used in performance-based contracts, focusing on the following factors:

- Can reliable and verifiable data be collected at the desired frequency for payment?
- Can providers realistically influence the metric?
- Will the metric provide insight into potential disparities in service or outcomes by sub-groups (e.g., by gender, race)?
- Is the metric indicative of benefits for participants?

As a part of streamlining metrics for collection, it is important to balance the burden of measurement with the benefit of performance transparency. For instance, POP payments are made based on statutorily mandated goals, but DCF can collect and give feedback to agencies on other learning metrics to support continuous improvement of service delivery, like connections to referred services or the frequency of

emergency payment distribution. To support this discussion between DCF and agencies, Social Finance recommends that DCF rigorously explore any possibilities of automating information collection and leverage existing data collection to support calculation of metrics where possible. Automated data will make processing updates to a scorecard or any other performance-based payment structure significantly less burdensome on participants, agencies, and DCF.

Indiana's Management and Performance Hub combined information from five agencies and four public sources to create a database of records including Medicaid claims, taxable income, and demographics. Using this database, Indiana was able to uncover the underlying cause of its high infant mortality rate: younger mothers on Medicaid were not receiving the recommended number of prenatal visits. As a result of this discovery, the State Department of Health initiated a statewide education and outreach effort to specifically address this issue.⁹

1.F: Shorten the contract period.

While yearly contract updates with agencies have allowed DCF to update its expectations for W-2 services, the 12-year length of the current contract period may have dampened W-2 agencies' drive to make program updates and performance-oriented improvements. If they had been required to re-bid at more frequent intervals, they may have committed to more profound service delivery changes that better reflected both DCF's service philosophy and evolved thinking on TANF program approaches due to the possibility of new provider competition.

Fielding a procurement is administratively intensive, both for providers and for the state, but procurements are an important opportunity for DCF to re-set its vision and more comprehensively address program shortcomings. We recommend that the next contract period last for 5 to 6 years. We believe this is a sufficient length of time to understand if program changes brought about by the procurement are leading to positive outcomes for participant families without being so burdensome to DCF and providers as to make the process of procuring the system feel like a near constant activity.

⁹ The Pew Charitable Trusts (2018). [How States Use Data to Inform Decisions](#).

Recommendation 2: Expand the content covered within new worker training to address gaps in case management skills.

W-2 caseworkers face many challenges in performing their roles: high administrative demands, large caseloads, and low salaries lead to frequent turnover for similar positions across social service programs. Through interviews, it was further revealed that W-2 caseworkers, also known as Financial and Employment Planners (FEPs), might be inadequately equipped, and need more training to succeed in their roles.

Most W-2 agencies noted that the current new worker training (NWT) is often “cut and dry,” focusing more on the data entry responsibilities of the position. Instead, interviews identified that it should incorporate more “realistic” scenario-based training, highlighting the variety of cases and grey areas that workers may encounter. New workers have quit during or shortly after the NWT because the training’s administrative focus does not line up with their expectations for case management.

Enhancing new worker training and ongoing training are expected to contribute to better retention,¹⁰ which is important since according to agencies, it takes at least one year for a new worker to become fluent at their job. Higher caseworker retention is expected to improve W-2 participants’ overall experience and minimize any service disruption due to staff turnover.

2.A: Update DCF’s new worker training to focus on development of case management skills across an extended timeline.

Case managers rely on a wide set of skills to do their work well. A recent study suggests that case managers drive impact across three channels:¹¹

- *Psychosocial work*: interpersonal and emotional support provided through the relationship between caseworker and client.
- *Resolving basic needs*: support to mitigate the impact of social conditions on client success.
- *System mediation work*: support to navigate systems, coordinate resources, and communicate information.

Social Finance recommends updating both the content covered in DCF’s new worker training and the delivery of that information to prepare W-2 caseworkers for supporting clients across all three of these channels. First, to support the development of a caseworker’s psychosocial work skills, training should include opportunities for role-playing where caseworkers can practice how they would interact with a client across different scenarios. Regarding caseworkers’ ability to help participants resolve basic needs, interviews suggest that agencies do not always have a consistent understanding of important DCF policies that may limit the utilization of available participant supports. For example, we heard varying perspectives

¹⁰ Society for Human Resources Management (2022). [How learning and development can attract—and retain—talent.](#)

¹¹ BMC Health Services (2022). [Conceptualizing the effective mechanisms of a social needs case management program shown to reduce hospital use: a qualitative study.](#)

on when to use emergency payments; when good cause approvals are appropriate; and distinctions between potential placements. New hire training should be leveraged to provide clarifications on these policies to caseworkers through policy guidance and real-world examples. This could take the form of example client journeys showing how the achievement of milestones by participants would support a change in placement to better align activity assignments, or by role-playing likely scenarios. Finally, developing a caseworker's system mediation abilities is a current focus of new worker training. While development of data management skills is essential to perform the role of a W-2 FEP, we recommend that DCF consider extending the timeline to cover these skills in the new worker training to first provide caseworkers with more context on how data is used in their interactions with clients.

To cover a wider breadth of training content, DCF could consider breaking up the NWT to weave in more hands-on practice. For example, instead of having new workers complete the training in one concentrated period (current content may take between 90-150 hours), agencies could allow new workers to manage a small caseload under supervision before taking more advanced training modules. We recognize that many agencies currently find it difficult to keep each worker's caseload below the 80:1 limit due to high turnover, which results in a shorter timeline before a new worker takes on a full caseload. In these situations, the worker would experience the whiplash of moving from classroom learning almost immediately to managing 80 participants. Breaking up the NWT will require additional supervision but may be a smoother transition for new workers to practice what they are learning and increase retention.

Finally, to provide potential candidates for a W-2 caseworker position with greater transparency on what the role involves, we recommend that DCF guide agencies in updating job descriptions and classifications to better reflect the requirements of the role, onboarding timeline, and new hire resources to provide candidates with greater transparency.

2.B: Engage and support caseworkers in the process of continuously improving new hire training.

We also recommend that DCF seek out feedback from caseworkers on potential improvements to training. DCF could leverage the expertise of high-performing staff in refining the training curriculum and/or assisting in hands-on practice for new workers. To balance this additional request of caseworkers, DCF should consider counting caseworker involvement towards their annual required hours for professional development, as well as compensating them for their time.

The State of Utah contracts with the University of Utah's Social Research Institute to provide participant data and survey results on overall experiences with FEP workers. The Institute helped develop caseworker training modules that take into account participant challenges, including trauma-informed approaches, executive functioning skills, motivational interviewing, human development, and case management.¹²

¹² State of Utah (2019). [Utah's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\) State Plan](#).

Frequent operational changes and new requirements (e.g., Monitoring 2.0) require caseworkers to adapt quickly to new guidance. Training materials can come from numerous sources and levels (W-2 Manual, DCF's operations memos, agency standard operating procedures, and more). In our interviews, agency leadership and staff frequently flagged this challenge of having to process a lot of changing information, which added confusion to an already complex program. Although DCF is providing policy refresher training on an ongoing basis, we recommend creating a central hub of information, similar to the W-2 Manual but adapted to be clearer to W-2 agency staff and easier to navigate, that can be referenced on an as-needed basis as discussed further in Recommendation 3.B. Additionally, implementing communication plans with any large program changes or updates can help with the dissemination of information.

Recommendation 3: Make participant-focused updates to how the program and its benefits are communicated.

The materials and the messages to participants about W-2 and the program's benefits are not just important for helping participants understand how the program can support their employment goals, they are also important indicators of the larger program culture. Nonetheless, materials used to describe W-2 fail to effectively communicate all of the program's benefits and the opportunities it provides to participants, focusing instead only on the program requirements. We believe DCF can take a larger role in setting the substance and tone of the messages about the program that participants receive.

3.A: Create participant-facing materials that are clear about W-2 program benefits.

In our interviews with participants and other program stakeholders, participants were frequently unaware of the services and supports available to them, whether through W-2 (including emergency payments) or other programs (such as connections to higher education institutions). Customer-facing information about W-2 is hard to decipher: it presents as an extensive list of program requirements. Many of the program's terms are communicated to participants through a six-page document, which caseworkers read aloud to them during the intake process. However, this document primarily focuses on the program's requirements, rather than giving providing clear information about the benefits available to eligible participants or the services that a W-2 agency can facilitate for their families. Information at intake should consistently explain connections to other state and community resources, and specifically identify other resources accessible to participants eligible for W-2.

We recommend that DCF develop concise and engaging videos to inform participants about the W-2 program. The content should highlight the services participants will receive, their responsibilities within the program, and additional programs and resources outside of W-2 offerings that may be available to participants. Information should be offered to participants in a format that they can continue to reference as their circumstances evolve and benefits may newly be of interest.

The Tennessee Department of Human Services develops informational videos – many featuring current or former participants – to share program expectations, details, and perspectives with other participants. The Department also utilizes social media (e.g., Facebook page) to share timely program information and updates with participants.¹³

3.B: Establish a process for agencies to clarify key policies that impact person-centered service delivery.

While we identified specific examples of confusion over program policy during our assessment and highlighted those areas for focus in staff training as discussed in Recommendation 2, other areas might also merit clarification. We recommend that DCF organize a process to seek out additional agency

¹³ Tennessee DHS staff members in interview

feedback on ambiguous areas and consider methods to provide greater clarity to agencies on key program policies. This process could include establishing regular office hours for agency staff; setting up an online question forum, with past questions and answers available, searchable, and search engine optimized; and setting up a standing committee to resolve conflicting or complex areas of policy.

Persistent confusion over emergency payments factors into our decision to make this recommendation: again and again, W-2 agencies indicated that they believed emergency payments were capped at \$750 per W-2 engagement episode. Despite DCF's clarification to us that the reference in the policy manual W-2 agencies cited was a suggestion, not a rule, the confusion over the policy manual text can create true obstacles to whole-family case management approaches.

There are multiple channels DCF and W-2 agencies use to communicate; thus, it may be more efficient to clarify policy confusion through an established process. However, W-2 agencies indicated that specific attention to confusion over program policy would help them better gauge when and how to offer participant support.

3.C: Rebrand W-2, focusing on strategies to change messaging and attitudes among W-2 agency leadership and staff.

During the assessment, we heard from many stakeholders about the tension at the center of W-2's identity: is it an employment program, or is it a human services program? To say that it is both, while true, elides much about its unique program history and the place it occupies in the minds of residents, especially its place as a successor to Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

Many we spoke with, across stakeholder groups, view the program first as an income support program – albeit one with extensive enrollment and employment requirements. DCF staff expressed that this popular understanding misleads about the program's potential impact on families. The orientation of the program toward work, as embedded in the federal and state laws that govern it, limits what the program can offer in the way of direct assistance. Evaluated from the perspective of what the program can do right away for families experiencing economic hardship, it will come up short when compared to alternatives that do not structurally prioritize work to the same degree. Further, the history of the program as an income support program may also inflect agency culture and the attitudes of W-2 agency staff, even if approved training materials or case management procedures emphasize the transformative potential of the program's services.

In our conversations with participants, some also explained that the resources provided by the program do make a significant difference for their families in achieving stability. Given that, we recommend more forceful rebranding of the program, employing the framing that W-2 is a tool for helping families reach their economic potential and elevating the stories of participants to clarify what the program can help families achieve.

DCF has already adopted messaging that emphasizes the program’s potential beyond the limited cash assistance it offers.¹⁴ Additionally, DCF should provide guidance to W-2 agencies on how they frame the program with their respective staffs. Beyond what their participant-facing materials say, guidance to W-2 agencies should compel them to review the perceptions their caseworkers carry about the program into participant interactions and the perceptions that their leaders project when they speak with staff. Another option is to require agencies to develop a “culture change plan” outlining how they will reorient leadership and caseworker attitudes about the program, and how they will drive shifts in thinking about the program internally, either as a component of the procurement or in contracting after providers are selected.

In addition to the recommendations we offer elsewhere to facilitate the appropriate use of good cause, especially training (Recommendation 2) to help give caseworkers more clarity about when good cause approvals are appropriate, changing the internal narrative may also help shift caseworker attitudes toward the use of good cause. We heard from participants that when communicating to their caseworker instances where events prevented the completion of assigned activities, participants were met with requests for documentation rather than understanding, even during a particularly difficult time such as the loss of a loved one. This contributed to participants not feeling trusted by their caseworker. Instead, alongside an appropriately timed request for proper documentation, caseworkers should see these events as an opportunity to help connect participants with a service that might prevent the need for a good cause approval in the future, rather than viewing good cause approvals skeptically.

¹⁴ See [DCF informational page on W-2](#). “Wisconsin Works, also known as W-2, can help you get a job and find a career path to support your family. If you want to build you skills and start or continue a career path, Wisconsin Works provides real work experience and training, access to education, job interview preparation, and job matching. You may also get cash assistance while preparing for work.”

Recommendation 4: Adjust program policies to ease administrative burdens connected to enrollment and activity planning.

Alongside the re-procurement, DCF should consider adjustments to policy that would remove any unnecessary administrative burdens participants experience when enrolling or completing activities in the program. Many of these burdens are spelled out in federal and state law and are thus not subject to change, but here we offer some program changes that may ease the experience of enrolling in W-2 and starting activities aligned with participant career goals.

4.A: Add a “stabilization period” to the early participation process to address barriers prior to beginning work activities.

W-2 applicants come in facing a wide variety of personal challenges – the Urban Institute has noted that “most TANF recipients have at least one barrier to work and many have multiple.”¹⁵ These barriers can include housing insecurity, food insecurity, domestic violence, and physical or mental disabilities. While W-2’s current process includes assessments to gain an understanding of some of these categories, participants frequently lack the time and support necessary to address barriers prior to engaging in job readiness or work activities. Participants interviewed noted that required activities were assigned shortly after being approved for the program – as soon as the very next day.

Adding a short-term stabilization period (e.g., 1-3 weeks), dedicated to barrier identification and remediation, into the early stages of the participation process would allow participants to address critical areas in their lives before fully engaging with W-2. This adjustment would also allow caseworkers more time to develop a relationship built on trust and understanding with each participant.

*Michigan’s Partnership, Accountability, Training, Hope (PATH) program features a 21-day assessment period during which barriers to employment are identified and caseworkers work individually with participants to connect them with resources to address these barriers. The program includes a 10-day period focused on barrier remediation prior to formally enrolling participants in the program. It also includes an optional 50-question, web-based, participant self-assessment designed to identify the participant’s strengths and barriers.*¹⁶

Based on discussions with DCF staff, there may be an allowable window for a “stabilization period” after a participant has received a placement in the program, but before activities are assigned. Contracts could incentivize or require agencies to ensure that certain “stabilization” metrics are met before a participant can start their activity plan.

¹⁵ Urban Institute (2011). [TANF Recipients with Barriers to Employment](#).

¹⁶ Michigan’s PATH Program Guidelines. [Chapter 6: Application Eligibility Period](#).

4.B: Provide guidance that allows participants to more easily pursue education programs at technical colleges.

Many participants and community advocates expressed frustration with the limited educational opportunities encouraged by and supported through Wisconsin Works, specifically at technical colleges. While participants are allowed to engage with any of Wisconsin's 16 non-private technical colleges, numerous interviewees shared that accessing these opportunities proved challenging in practice. These challenges included lack of awareness (e.g., agencies did not promote the opportunity) as well as lack of support (e.g., agencies did not assist in the completion of financial aid forms).

Given the differences between what is allowed by the program and what agencies are communicating to participants, DCF should clarify with agencies 1) the educational opportunities approved for participants and 2) the support agencies should provide to enroll participants in a technical college program. A memo from DCF to agencies and embedding clear information about the standard operating procedures for educational referrals could help. However, ultimately, tracking agencies' future referrals to education and training programs offers the best avenue for ensuring that participants are clear about education options. Further, DCF should consider using TANF funding for education expenses when all other funding sources, such as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), have been exhausted.

Some interviewees also expressed frustration with the current reality of hiring out-of-state companies to train participants when Wisconsin already has technical colleges with high job placement rates available. Training programs developed by W-2 agencies and provided in-house do not always align skills with in-demand employer partners or jobs. While this in-house training can still be beneficial, many participants noted that this was not a path towards a guaranteed job and that established technical colleges may be a better option. Tracking placement rates and holding agencies accountable for training program success can compel agencies to seek out higher-quality training.

Other states have taken advantage of the link between their state's community or technical colleges and TANF programs. For example, Kentucky's Ready to Work program provides comprehensive services to help TANF parents enroll and succeed in the state's community and technical colleges – including outreach and recruitment, education and career planning or coaching, tutoring, case management, and retention strategies. A key component of the program is the development and support of work-study opportunities, which allow a student to work up to 30 hours per week without impacting the amount of their TANF benefit.^{17,18} Breaking down barriers for participants to access local, career-oriented education pathways – and encouraging agencies to promote these pathways – would help participants build long-term skills while participating in W-2.

¹⁷ Kentucky Community and Technical College System. [About](#).

¹⁸ Administration for Children and Families (2016). [Supporting Postsecondary Completion for TANF Recipients through Work-Study Programs](#).

4.C: Streamline W-2 placement and activity codes.

The path through Wisconsin Works differs for everyone based on their background, personal situation, and career goals. Given that, it follows logically that there are different “codes” for unique program placements and activity types. However, a consistent theme emerged during our interviews: both participants and community advocates noted that several placements and activities were rarely utilized. Through our additional analysis of caseload data, we found that across 17 different placement categories available to agency workers, six placements made up 97 percent of the W-2 caseload.¹⁹ Based on interview takeaways, we understand activity codes (assignments) follow a similar pattern, such that a few codes make up the majority of activities. While it may be that certain codes should be used less frequently by design, the consensus was that caseworkers tend to standardize their support and often overlook the unique circumstances and needs of individual participants.

While personalized case management support is a topic that is discussed elsewhere in this report (see Recommendation 7 and Recommendation 5.B), DCF should review the current range of placement and activity codes and consider if they accurately reflect both whole-family case management goals and the development of activity plans that will result in strong employment outcomes. To the extent that the spectrum of codes can be improved, adjustments should be made. If used more effectively, the assignment of activity codes could be an early “nudge” to focus caseworkers on participants’ barriers and career development goals; however, the codes will remain a rote step in activity planning if the codes do not match up with participant career planning needs.

¹⁹ Wisconsin Bureau of Analytics and Research. [W-2 Participants by Placement Types \(Jan – May 2023\)](#).

Recommendation 5: Require agencies to adopt processes that ensure consistent, purposeful communication with participants.

When developing a new structure for contracting with agencies to deliver Wisconsin Works, DCF should incorporate requirements that encourage proactive, personalized communication with and support for participants. Consistent communication was the most frequent complaint participants surfaced about their interactions with caseworkers. Participants also said that having a caseworker who they felt understood them and supported their career goals was critical to remaining in the program. While this recommendation shares some overlap with others in the report, we have isolated it as a key area for DCF's focus given the crucial role that timely communication plays in W-2 participants' program experience.

5.A: Reinforce the need for caseworkers to connect with and respond to participants on a frequent, timely basis.

Proactive communication from caseworkers is a critical component of participant success in W-2. Caseworkers should schedule meetings with sufficient notice (e.g., not only off-the-cuff phone calls); follow up if participants are not able to attend; make time for recurring meetings (such as the six-month informal assessment review); and regularly respond to participant outreach.

This supporting recommendation may seem intuitive, but issues with contacting their caseworker was one of the most common challenges brought up by participants in interviews. DCF must clearly signify the importance of consistent, timely communication between caseworkers and participants. To do so, they could embed contract language setting expectations for communication; provide communication and client customer service requirements in new worker training materials; and emphasize communication expectations in ongoing performance management conversations with agencies.

5.B: Direct caseworkers to project person-centered support throughout intake and ongoing participation in the program.

Purposeful interactions between caseworkers and participants are just as important as consistent communication. In a study where researchers asked (non-Wisconsin) TANF participants about the most important characteristics of caseworker performance, the most-emphasized qualities were substantive competence, accessibility, and interpersonal relations.²⁰ Wisconsin interviewees for this project, however, experienced W-2 caseworkers as hard to get in touch with, process-focused, with a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

Caseworkers should consider how participants prefer to communicate, good windows for contacting them, and restrictions on their time. Follow-ups with participants should be conscientious, but not so persistent as to give participants reason to believe the communication is excessive.

²⁰ Families in Society (2001). [Welfare Recipient Views about Caseworker Performance: Lessons for Developing TANF Case Management Practices.](#)

Participants shared that often the most helpful component of a caseworker’s role is something participants don’t always receive in Wisconsin Works – simply, a support system. Being a support system could include supporting applicants through difficulties in the intake process (e.g., verification documents that are challenging to obtain); prioritizing the obtainment of a childcare subsidy as soon as possible (e.g., as soon as W-2 activities are assigned) to allow the parent to engage in program activities; spending time understanding and purposefully addressing barriers (e.g., not just sharing a list of phone numbers, but following up on progress); or simply ensuring that a participant has a clear understanding of the activities and requirements set before them.

Through the re-procurement, we recommend that DCF reinforce communication expectations for the program. This should include RFP questions asking how respondents plan to ensure caseworker accessibility and engagement with participants, align assigned activities with participants’ goal progression, and guarantee that participants are connected to all available services and supports. Clearer expectations around communication will complement additional suggestions for case management, further explained in Recommendation 7.

Recommendation 6: Develop partnerships across social service organizations and departments for more comprehensive whole-family service delivery.

Every group we interviewed stressed that cash benefits paid to TANF participants are too low on their own to provide meaningful support for participant families. Many independent researchers have validated that TANF benefit levels are low “... and are not sufficient to meet all basic needs.”²¹ The \$653 per month payment to participants in Community Service Jobs (CSJs) equates to \$7,836 annually, which is about 40 percent of the federal poverty level for a family of two.²² However, cash benefit amounts are set in statute, and Wisconsin’s maximum cash benefits are high when compared to other states in the Midwest.²³ While the cash benefit is not the only benefit participants receive under TANF – for instance, W-2 provides funding for childcare – TANF alone cannot support participants’ basic needs. Partnerships with other programs – including WIOA, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Women, Infants, & Nutrition Program (WIC), and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), that are “designed to help people experiencing hardship pay for necessities and find work”²⁴ – are critical to supporting participants.

Participants described many challenges that make it difficult to engage in program activities, like unstable housing, lack of affordable childcare, intimate partner violence, and difficulty finding medical and mental health services. We also learned about the crucial role fathers play in stabilizing their families. DCF can further strengthen families by helping both parents access available programs and resources throughout the state. Many of these services exceed the capacity of W-2 agencies; thus, to best support participants, agencies must forge strong partnerships with other social service providers for seamless referrals. Deep relationships with external providers are needed to coordinate efforts across multiple service systems and to ensure that W-2 agencies can lean on partnerships to deliver integrated, holistic services according to participant need.

While we discuss the role of caseworkers in helping participants connect across services with more granular detail in Recommendation 7, in this section we propose how shifts in policy at DCF or at the W-2 agency leadership level would facilitate better participant service coordination.

6.A: Require agencies to build deep relationships and coordinate efforts with community partners, like Community Action Agencies, who can enhance services for participant families.

Participants receiving TANF services often need support beyond employment assistance. While W-2 agencies may be able to offer general in-house support in some areas – such as guidance on how to apply for rental assistance – there are often other organizations that can provide more specialized or in-depth services. For example, Wisconsin has a network of sixteen local Community Action Programs (CAPs) that

²¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2022). [Policy Basics: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#).

²² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [Poverty Guidelines for 2023](#). A household size of two is the minimum eligible for W-2.

²³ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2023). [Increases in TANF Cash Benefit Levels Are Critical to Help Families Meet Rising Costs](#). Sanctions have the potential to significantly reduce the cash benefits participants receive.

²⁴ Center for American Progress (2020). [TANF Is a Key Part of the Mix of Aid Programs Supporting Families During COVID-19 Crisis](#).

provide holistic poverty alleviation services.²⁵ CAPs are sometimes better integrated with or aware of the resources and programs available to support Wisconsin residents in poverty. Deepening relationships with CAPs will allow participants to complement the employment and case management support they receive from W-2 agencies with a wider net of resources.

DCF can strengthen pathways between W-2 agencies and other service providers through contracts and policy. For example, trainings or resources that give caseworkers informed knowledge of broader local support options could help caseworkers relay that understanding to families. Additionally, contract requirements could facilitate tighter service connections between W-2 agencies and other community partners, including requirements to provide “closed-loop referrals” (i.e., whether someone who was referred to a social service received that service). The re-procurement may also present an opportunity for agencies to offer assurances to DCF on how they can integrate service partnerships into their operations by requesting that respondents share a strategy for how they will connect participants to external resources. Additional expectations for partnerships between W-2 caseworkers and supportive service organizations are detailed in Recommendation 7.A.

6.B: Strengthen alignment with other government agencies and programs.

Other public workforce training programs, such as those offered through WIOA and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training (SNAP E&T), have similar aims but offer different and sometimes complementary services. A 2017 study by the Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success said that “coordination [between WIOA and TANF] would provide closer connections to the labor market and increase program efficiency through reduced duplication.”²⁶ In a report written by the Center for Law and Social Policy, authors noted that potential benefits of integration between WIOA and TANF included “more and better employment-related services for TANF participants; broader access to supportive services (e.g., childcare) for workers and job seekers; more flexible use of funding to provide skills training; and greater responsiveness to employer needs.”²⁷ All of this points to the importance of aligning these programs so that together they can most effectively provide workforce services for participants with limited financial resources.

Interviews indicated that participant connections between TANF, WIOA, and SNAP E&T are more often incidental than purposeful. Although W-2 agencies are often co-located with job centers, providing the opportunity for easier transitions between W-2 programs and services funded through or overseen by other programs, deliberate participant connections by caseworkers often do not happen. Furthermore, at the state level, interviews did not indicate that there is structured, joint planning between DCF and the workforce authority, the Department of Workforce Development.

²⁵ [Wisconsin Community Action Program \(WISCAP\)](#).

²⁶ Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success (2017). [Coordinating TANF and WIOA](#).

²⁷ Center for Law and Social Policy (2003). [Means to an End: Integration of Welfare and Workforce Development Systems](#).

WIOA and SNAP E&T programs offer less-intensive employment supports than TANF-funded programs; nonetheless, W-2 agencies should give greater consideration to how each program's services can be packaged to create the best employment training plan for participants. Additionally, while current federal and state program structures may not make it feasible to completely integrate TANF performance measures with WIOA or SNAP E&T, more closely aligning employment outcome measures across the programs could create a common understanding of success.²⁸ This may help drive referrals between the programs for services best suited to help participants in achieving their career goals.

6.C: Partner with child welfare services to provide coordinated support to families who may be navigating two systems.

Engagement with child welfare services poses significant risks to family stability and puts children in those families at increased risk for adverse outcomes in the long term. For that reason, child welfare program leaders in Wisconsin have prioritized prevention of engagement with the child welfare system. Referrals to W-2 could help reduce referrals to child welfare. Also, TANF programs could provide resources similar to those available through the child welfare system, like emergency financial assistance or vouchers for clothing, without creating the need to open a child welfare case. And while one-time supports like these are part of the array of services available to families within the child welfare system, studies have found that these families are not sufficiently connected to ongoing financial and work supports like those available through TANF.²⁹

Building purposeful relationships between W-2 and child welfare agencies would be a helpful step to providing more holistic, supportive services to families in need. Experts and other states have recommended best practices to improve coordination between these two systems. In a 2014 report, the Center for the Study of Social Policy recommended allowing child welfare case plan activities to fulfill TANF requirements, or at least to suspend work requirements until the case plan is completed, as a way to better support low-income families in the child welfare system.³⁰ While statute may limit which parts of this strategy could be implemented in Wisconsin, the previously discussed stabilization period (see Recommendation 4.A) could be an appropriate time for child welfare case plan activities, and judicious use of good cause approvals could help parents meet all case plan requirements and keep families intact.

Linkages is a collaboration in California between CalWORKs and Child Welfare that creates a continuum of services to promote child and family well-being by facilitating accurate and systematic identification of families eligible coordinated services. This prevents parents or caretakers from needing to navigate between two different systems which often have conflicting requirements and timeframes. Linkages works

²⁸ Urban Institute (2018). [Measuring Employment Outcomes in TANF](#).

²⁹ Center for the Study of Social Policy (2014). [Prevent, Protect & Provide: How child welfare can better support low-income families](#).

³⁰ Center for the Study of Social Policy (2014). [Prevent, Protect & Provide: How child welfare can better support low-income families](#). Child welfare case plan activities could include activities a parent needs to undertake to make a home safe for their children.

to improve the services coordination and case planning, prevents duplication of efforts, and maximizes funding and resources to better serve clients accessing both systems.³¹

In addition, others have noted that multi-generational approaches which build family well-being by working with adults and children together can be effective prevention strategies. Support of a child's healthy early development can address significant challenges that may hinder family well-being and lead to involvement with child welfare.³² Some states (including California) have set up a collaboration between their TANF and child welfare programs to help identify and support families who are navigating both systems. To prioritize child welfare prevention within the W-2 program, changes can be introduced at the service level, and solidified through contract stipulations or incentives.

Additionally, though divisions at DCF are already tightly integrated, DCF might consider how it can align on service provider contracts, to require more communication between these systems and to share resources between them in ways that could strengthen case management for families engaged with both systems. One possibility is to require more intensive case management interventions for families flagged in both systems, and divide resources between divisions in the ways that make the most efficient use of funding to support service delivery to these families.

³¹ Child and Family Policy Institute of California. [What is Linkages?](#)

³² Center for the Study of Social Policy (2014). [Prevent, Protect & Provide: How child welfare can better support low-income families.](#)

Recommendation 7: Improve the interactions that caseworkers have with their clients.

Although we have covered case management across other recommendations, we offer a few recommendations here that are more principally focused on service delivery. In addition to training (Recommendation 2) and communication (Recommendation 5), changes in case management practice will be necessary to ensure agencies are providing true, whole-family case management services.

7.A: Set requirements that drive greater case coordination between W-2 agencies and other service providers.

To provide customized support for all W-2 participants, DCF should pursue re-procurement and contracting strategies that push agencies to focus case management on barrier remediation by coordinating services across multiple providers. It is one thing to be aware of the barriers participants face and what resources might help address those barriers, it is another thing for a caseworker to ensure that their clients are receiving the services they need. This means that in addition to expecting FEPs to be experts in the services that are available for their clients, DCF must also communicate an expectation that caseworkers should be personally advocating for their clients with supportive service partner organizations.

Through its Pathways to Prosperity and Well-Being Pilot, Dakota County in Minnesota offers a nuanced, person-centered approach to case management. The program's foundational pillars are trust, flexibility, and an emphasis on addressing the social determinants of health and wellness. One of the program's aims is to recognize that no two-family circumstances are exactly alike; therefore, the Pathways intervention must attend to the specifics of needs and circumstances. Staff are encouraged to effectively engage and develop trust with families in order to deliver responsive services.³³

Studies show that work barriers such as 1) lack of education and work experience, 2) mental and physical health challenges, and 3) caring for a child with special needs are associated with significantly lower employment among TANF recipients.³⁴ While W-2 agencies connect participants with education and work experience directly, they do not provide direct services to participants with mental and physical health challenges or parents of children with special needs. To remove these barriers, caseworkers need to look beyond their W-2 agency and pull together services for participants to access as seamlessly as possible. This is seldom easy work, but it is possible when caseworkers have established relationships with other reliable, high-quality service providers who have the capacity to help.

The District of Columbia's Department of Human Services (DHS) began refocusing their TANF services to implement a two-generation (2Gen) approach in 2018. In addition to efforts to support work readiness,

³³ Dakota County staff members in interview

³⁴ Urban Institute (2011). [TANF Recipients with Barriers to Employment](#).

*their model also prioritizes other core components including social capital, economic assets, childhood development, and health and well-being. By focusing more on education and training and incorporating 2Gen activities into participant planning, DHS has made progress moving away from a compliance model to a whole-family barrier reduction strategy.*³⁵

Beyond acting as advocates for their clients, caseworkers should maintain relationships with supportive service partners in order to conduct case conferencing, which could take the form of recurring meetings across stakeholders to coordinate resources for participants and identify areas where service delivery improvements can support better outcomes.³⁶ Social Finance recommends DCF communicate the expectation that W-2 caseworkers will be involved in case conferencing together with supportive service organizations. Additionally, DCF should establish a feedback loop connecting these case conferencing conversations with W-2 program leadership to identify other services that are in demand by W-2 participants. This could include creating an ad-hoc caseworker advisory structure, where caseworkers share program information directly with DCF either through meeting or through anonymous feedback surveys, allowing DCF to make changes on case management policies in ways that support whole-family service approaches.

*Since 2003, the Partnership for Family Success (PFS) program in Anoka County, Minnesota, has provided family-based team case management to individuals served by multiple programs and departments. The PFS team is made up of workers from various Human Services Departments, including Corrections, Community Health and Environmental Health Services, Community Social Services and Mental Health, Income Maintenance, and the Workforce Center (which operates the Vocational Rehabilitation program and provides employment and training services to WIOA job seekers and TANF recipients). During weekly two-hour meetings, the team discusses clients' service strategies, makes recommendations, and identifies ways to strengthen service delivery through integrated policies and procedures.*³⁷

7.B: Require agencies to specialize staff or hire people with skills that could meaningfully support participants in key service dimensions, like mental health.

The role of a W-2 caseworker is multi-dimensional, blending expertise in social work – such as cultivating interpersonal relationships and aiding those facing challenges – with a basic understanding of data management. Social Finance recommends that DCF explore how increased specialization in staffing, strategic partnerships, or contracts can further improve delivery of quality services across the above dimensions.

³⁵ Ascend at the Aspen Institute (2020). [Two-Generation Approach to Leveraging TANF](#).

³⁶ Community Solutions (2020). [What is Case Conferencing in Homeless Services?](#)

³⁷ Mathematica (2011). [Effective Case Management: Key Elements and Practices from the Field](#).

To ensure that caseworkers have job training and skills that directly support participant service needs, we recommend that DCF encourage agencies to hire caseworkers with specialized behavioral or mental health expertise, or employ another strategy to make mental health services available at W-2 agencies, like co-location. Mental health professionals who can perform assessments and make referrals to mental health treatment providers may complement caseworkers' ability to address other barriers to work. Similarly, interviews highlighted that a participant's path from Wisconsin Works Transition (W-2T) – a placement designed for individuals not prepared for unsubsidized employment, due to reasons like personal incapacitation or the need to care for another incapacitated person living with a disability – to enrollment in SSI/SSDI is often not straightforward. This feedback might suggest that the addition of a disability specialist to either the agency's staff or as a partner organization would support a smoother transition, and support caseworkers to serve both W-2T clients and the remainder of their clients in other placements successfully.

North Carolina's Work First program understands that substance misuse and mental health issues are significant barriers to successful program participation and family well-being. Applicants and recipients may be hesitant to self-report mental health challenges because they do not recognize the symptoms, or they want to avoid stigma. To assist in the identification of mental health concerns all Work First applicants and recipients may volunteer to complete a mental health screening. The mental health screening is not a condition of eligibility.³⁸

Where some interviews noted difficulty finding and retaining caseworkers with proficiency in both people and data entry skills, others highlighted ways that agencies have leaned into this challenge by splitting eligibility and case management responsibilities across different roles. This separation of duties helps client-facing workers focus their efforts on person-centered case management.

Recognizing that splitting case management and eligibility may not be possible within the scope of the coming re-procurement, Social Finance recommends that DCF separate these functions within the agencies. To the extent that DCF finds that this procurement structure is feasible to pursue operationally, it will be important to weigh the potential benefit of higher case management quality with the potential for greater burden on participants in navigating a more disintegrated W-2 system before proceeding with implementation – or increasing the number of W-2 agency workers participants encounter. While the proposed change in procurement might entail a temporary increase in the administrative load for participants as they interact with a larger number of organizations and staff, its potential to help case managers focus on supporting whole-family goals could provide for better support for participants overall.

³⁸ North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. [Work First Substance Use/Mental Health Initiative](#).

7.C: Use case management reviews to improve agency and caseworker performance and to reward exceptional casework

Building on existing customer feedback channels, like the participant survey and the W-2 Customer Helpline (see Recommendation 8.A), Social Finance recommends DCF use reviews of agency case management episodes, or full “after-action” reviews for closed W-2 cases, to further measure an agency’s case management quality. An after-action review on case management services would consist of assembling DCF staff with case management experience and tasking them to look at a random sample of closed cases at each agency. The staff assembled would look at participant case files and interview participants and agency staff who worked on the case. While linking the results of the after-action review with performance payments is in tension with ensuring that agency staff can engage honestly on these reviews (because they will be pushed to present the agency’s actions in the best light), an open and collaborative discussion between DCF and agencies following these case reviews could be appropriate component of Monitoring, or, ideally, would stand completely apart from it.

In Recommendation 1, we recommend tying case management metrics to agency performance-based payments. DCF could also consider using these inputs to direct incentives to top-performing caseworkers. Participants could voluntarily recommend their caseworker for recognition by DCF via survey or through DCF’s customer service line. Rewards for caseworkers could come in the form of monetary and non-monetary incentives including bonus payments for the caseworker(s) with the highest number of participant nominations, and/or reduction in professional development requirements (or other administrative requirements) for caseworkers performing above a certain level on case management metrics.

Social Finance will work with DCF in Phase 2 to align on strategies to collect input from participants that can be used to support both an assessment of case management quality and awards for caseworkers.

7.D: Centralize oversight at DCF to more effectively monitor W-2 agency activity.

Monitoring is currently conducted by Regional Administrators and Regional Coordinators (Regionals) working under BWF and by the Bureau of Regional Operations (BRO) sections. These Regionals regularly communicate with W-2 agencies to drive improvements in compliance performance measures, including oversight of case management practices such as activity assignment and development of employability plans. Because BRO Regionals are not under BWF’s purview, it is difficult for BWF to advance critical program goals consistently across agencies. In order for DCF to have a unified strategy for monitoring, DCF should integrate BRO Regionals under BWF’s oversight.

Recommendation 8: Collect participant feedback regularly and use it to drive program improvements.

The best expertise available on how a program is serving its participants is from participants themselves. Participant engagement in focus groups indicated strong interest in sharing feedback on services offered by W-2, but participants indicated that they do not feel as though their feedback is often requested or utilized. Benefitting from this input begins with DCF establishing robust feedback mechanisms and communication channels that are publicized and easily accessible to participants. In this section, we provide some suggestions for actively incorporating and acting upon participant feedback, so W-2 can offer more dynamic, participant-centric services.

8.A: Increase awareness and availability of participant feedback opportunities.

The Customer Helpline could be better positioned as a feedback gathering tool. From December 2021 to December 2022, DCF's customer service line (the Customer Helpline) received 596 calls related to W-2, most of which highlighted complaints or a lack of clarity about services, ranging from inquiries about addresses to follow-ups on benefit payments. Calls to the Customer Helpline predominantly fell into three categories: Access (34 percent) – callers seeking information on application processes or in need of cash/emergency assistance; Participation (34 percent) – calls involving difficulties in contacting FEPs or questions about sanctions or payment changes; and Intake (18 percent) – calls related to missed appointments or a lack of communication about the next steps from the agency.

While participants provide feedback about the agencies and program through the Customer Helpline, awareness of the line is inconsistent, and any insights drawn from it can be too nebulous to translate into actionable data. Agencies should clearly publicize the Customer Helpline and educate participants on when and why to use it. To broaden accessibility, DCF should make feedback easy to submit through a variety of platforms, not just the Customer Helpline, including easy-to-access customer complaint forms that get fed directly to DCF staff dedicated to acknowledging and following through on the complaint.

Refining the data collection process from the Customer Helpline to improve data quality would enable better tracking of agency complaints and could help to generate new service improvement ideas. In addition to developing a process for translating the substance of these calls into broad program or provider-specific insights, Social Finance recommends that DCF utilize information from customer calls to identify areas of program improvement by making review of Customer Helpline data a standing agenda item at contractors' meetings. The Customer Helpline could also be used as a supplementary source of information on case management reviews and performance, as described in Recommendation 7.C.

Our assessment also highlighted opportunities to improve the collection of participant feedback through surveys. In 2022, DCF's quarterly customer feedback survey received a 16 percent response rate, yet in the first and second quarters of 2023, the rates dropped to 13 percent and five percent, respectively. Several participants we interviewed noted that they had never received the survey, indicating that current distribution methods may not reach their fully intended audience. Further, while the topics covered in the

survey may provide answers to questions DCF has about participants' experience with their W-2 agencies, additional feedback from participants is needed to understand their experience and elevate opportunities for service delivery improvement.

*The Colorado Department of Human Services "Colorado Workers Leavers Survey" measures the effectiveness of the Colorado Works program. These quarterly surveys, dispatched to 800 participants who recently exited the program, cover a diverse range of questions—from participant experiences to reasons for leaving. The feedback, subsequently published every three months, has proven instrumental in refining the program based on real-world experiences. However, while the regularity and granularity of the feedback provide deep insights, they also demand substantial resources and rigorous data management.*³⁹

Social Finance recommends DCF and agencies work together to develop feedback processes at the state and programmatic levels that are mutually beneficial, fostering increased engagement and transparency for participants. Through this partnership, W-2 stakeholders may identify additional information to collect from participants including feedback at various stages of the participant journey – intake and early participation to understand how they learned about and contacted W-2, ongoing feedback to understand progress and challenges participants are experiencing with agency services, and at or after exit to understand why they have left the program. Potential strategies for collecting participant feedback on these topics at agencies include sending SMS surveys to participants at various program touchpoints (e.g., after a job interview, or at a job retention milestone); posing anonymous survey questions on a tablet in the organization's waiting rooms; requesting that case managers conclude their participant sessions with a debrief on what is or is not working well; and conducting standard focus groups.

Additionally, DCF and agencies should work together to increase participants' response rate to feedback requests. This may include leveraging the myACCESS application as an established pathway to customer engagement to circulate customer feedback surveys, responses to which could be reviewed by agencies and DCF alike. DCF may also benefit from more direct coordination with caseworkers to collect the most up-to-date contact information for participants in order to distribute their quarterly customer feedback survey. Compensating participants for their input may also boost responses.

8.B: Broaden the channels of information that participants can use to get information about W-2.

When participants possess the knowledge they need, they are better equipped to support their own journeys to self-sufficiency. However, DCF noted that participants rely heavily on agencies for information, which can both limit the information they receive and the feedback to DCF on which materials resonate. As discussed in Recommendation 3.A, DCF should supply agencies and participants with easy-to-understand materials that can help a participant comprehend the program guidelines, and mandate

³⁹ Colorado Department of Human Services. [Colorado Works \(TANF\) Leavers Survey | Colorado Department of Human Services](#).

agencies to affirm that the participants have received the necessary materials to empower them to take control of their own journey.

Participants currently receive a narrow perspective on essential program terms, assigned activities, reasons for sanctions, and the services accessible through the program that can best support them. Using informational materials about the program that feature participant stories may better convey what the program offers, and communicating those stories over mediums that current and future participants will engage with, particularly social media, will help broaden the stories' reach.

The Tennessee Department of Human Services makes concerted outreach via social media platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, and maintains an active connection with its participants. On their YouTube channels, participants – both current and former – discuss services and share experiences. The Department's Facebook page, with a significant follower base, is a dynamic medium for daily updates and participant engagement.⁴⁰

Such digital initiatives underscore the potential of social media for effective participant engagement. A potential pitfall lies in the assumption that all participants have ready access to these platforms: accessibility remains a challenge, with some areas or demographics having limited internet access. To address this, agencies might consider offline campaigns featuring participant sources to ensure a comprehensive reach.

Formalizing channels for participants to learn from each other may help new participants better navigate program requirements and lead them to ask their agencies more directed questions about the support available. During the participant focus groups we convened for this assessment, participants frequently remarked on the benefit of being able to speak with one another and to learn from each other's experiences. We witnessed, first-hand, participants learning about other services from their peers. We recommend that DCF formalize this process by working with agencies to convene participant support groups. Constraints on participants' time may make it difficult to organize these groups, but compensation for attendance could drive turnout.

8.C: Provide avenues for participants to change agencies.

Currently, participants are assigned a W-2 agency based on their address and are unable to transfer agencies, even if they are dissatisfied with the quality of the services they receive. Social Finance recommends that DCF allow participants to change agencies once they are enrolled and continue to explore strategies to support participants' ability to make an informed choice about which agency to work with prior to enrollment. While maintaining the current address-based guidance, DCF should work towards providing participant-facing information that informs selection of an agency based on

⁴⁰ Tennessee Department of Human Services. [Facebook channel](#).

performance information. Special consideration should be given to ensure the relevance of agencies to a specific participant population, understanding that diverse demographics have varying needs and expectations (e.g., rural versus urban).

8.D. Involve participants in community steering committees.

Partnering with participants at a strategic level can complement ongoing participant feedback methods and enable agencies to proactively incorporate participant voice in a way that supports decision-making. Working closely with a small group of participants to deeply discuss the strategic direction of the program not only offers candid feedback on how participants received services, but also gives participants the opportunity to have a say in decisions that directly impact them and their community. Wisconsin statute lays out a requirement for incorporating community perspectives through community steering committees for each W-2 agency that “advise the...agency concerning employment and training activities” and serve as a mechanism for the population being served to provide input on the program. While the involvement of community voices such as local employers is highly valuable, a community steering committee that does not include input or membership from program participants lacks what is perhaps the most crucial perspective it could have.

DCF should require agencies to ensure participant representation on community steering committees. In addition, agencies could employ other strategies to directly engage with participants and collect their input on programmatic decisions and strategies – such as inviting participants to engage in regular, structured discussions with agency leadership. It would also be helpful for DCF to have access to these discussions (e.g., through involvement from monitoring staff on community steering committees) and to consider establishing its own participant feedback advisory panel.

Recommendation 9: Prioritize changes to data infrastructure that would reduce barriers to supporting participants and understanding program impact.

The need for quality data collection underlies most, if not all, of the recommendations in this report. The state has shown progress in its efforts to improve data quality and offer participant-friendly automation solutions, especially in recent years, with an enhanced focus on monitoring and implementation of ACCESS and myACCESS. Recommendations for continued efforts to improve upon these systems highlight changes that could be made within DCF-owned systems, as well as changes to systems that are outside of DCF's direct control.

Siloed data systems inhibit the flow of critical information, often leading to redundancies, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities. By bridging the gap between agency data and data from other government programs, we can foster collaboration and ensure that resources are allocated where they are most needed. Prioritizing this integration is not just about improving data management, but about enhancing DCF's capacity to make informed decisions and maximize its impact.

9.A: Align systems to collect information on service delivery and whole-family metrics.

Information collected during program intake is intended to inform caseworkers about participants' goals and barriers. Data on participant barriers is entered into the Wisconsin Works Program (WWP) system through the Informal Assessment. Caseworkers are expected to meet with participants to fill out the Informal Assessment at intake and every six months thereafter while the participant is in the program. Currently, the Informal Assessment is set up to require that caseworkers answer questions on all potential barriers a participant might face every six months, rather than as a tool that facilitates focus on unique challenges identified by the participant and tracking of progress to mitigate those challenges.

With the input of caseworkers, we recommend adjusting the Informal Assessment to be used by caseworkers for checking in with their clients on whether supports they are receiving have helped or if new solutions need to be identified. This could involve participants filling out a self-assessment on areas where they are seeking support from the program and case managers. Information collected through this assessment would be valuable to both the caseworker involved and agency leadership. DCF could review the tool when evaluating agency case management quality.

Montana uses an assessment tool called the "Bridge Model" at intake and throughout participation in the state TANF program to help families identify strengths and to determine short- and long-term goal setting and barrier reduction approaches. The tool was designed to align with the program's goals of family stability, employability, and financial security. Additionally, it uses person-centered planning and self-direction where families engage in activities to support their journey to self-sufficiency that make sense for their personal or family circumstances.⁴¹

⁴¹ State of Montana (2020). [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\) State Plan.](#)

Once a participant is enrolled in the program, information on the services participants are receiving from their caseworker are primarily entered into case comments in a case management system (Caseworker Web or CWW). By design, information entered into case comments in CWW is not standardized to allow the worker to input information unique to a client's situation. However, because of this lack of standardization, review of the information entered into case comments involves a level of subjectivity in a monitor's assessment of services performed.

We believe there are some pieces of information in the case comments that could be standardized, allowing for more consistent consideration of these data points, that would not undermine the importance of conveying each client's unique challenges to work. For example, the addition of fields within CWW set up to collect information on how frequently caseworkers are meeting with their clients and how that interaction is taking place, information on the well-being of a client's child, and whether or not the client received an emergency payment or referral to a particular supportive service, are all pieces of information that would inform assessment of the quality of services the client is receiving and contribution of these factors to the achievement of client outcomes. Automation of fields such as how frequently caseworkers are meeting with their clients should be pursued where possible to minimize the administrative burden on caseworkers. As part of the process to identify metrics to include in performance-based contracts, we recommend DCF consider additional data points that would be meaningful to inform metric performance and continuous improvement of service delivery and prioritize system adjustments to allow for standardized tracking of that information.

9.B: Integrate existing systems to support delivery of quality case management.

W-2 is a complex program that involves a steep learning curve for caseworkers. Where supports like emergency payments are being underutilized, it may be that some caseworkers, especially those that were recently hired, are unaware that they could be offering this support. As a supplement to Recommendations 2 (Staff Training) and 7 (Case Management), Social Finance recommends that DCF explore ways to leverage technology to provide reminders to caseworkers about the tools available to them when supporting participants. One way that technology could be leveraged to support caseworkers to have the knowledge they need to make sure their clients receive all available services is to embed "behavioral nudges" into systems where caseworkers are entering client data. For example, when a caseworker is asking their client a question within the Informal Assessment such as "Are you at risk of having a utility disconnected?", entering a response of "Yes" would prompt a nudge to appear that encourages the caseworker to offer their client support in the form of an emergency payment.

Regarding a caseworker's capacity, during several of our interviews, program stakeholders pointed to the difficulty caseworkers face first in scheduling a meeting with a participant and then maintaining a quality conversation with their client while trying to enter information across sometimes three to four systems. While the role of caseworker often involves a need to be skilled in both client service and data entry, our assessment also highlighted instances of data entry merely involved duplicating information across systems. Ultimately, the burden of collecting this information multiple times rather than integrating data across systems falls on participants. With limited time in the program, the hours participants spend

collecting documentation and participating in eligibility reviews every six months is precious time that could otherwise be spent receiving support from their caseworker.

We recommend DCF pursue opportunities to integrate data across systems to reduce scheduling, data entry, and verification demands on caseworkers and participants, which should lead to increases in caseworker capacity and balance the addition of certain case management metrics noted in Recommendation 1. This could involve integrating systems in ways that allow fields to be pre-populated for caseworkers (as is already the case for some) but may also involve granting monitors access to state systems housing verification information rather than collecting this information from W-2 caseworkers and participants. Additionally, automation of participant-facing systems such as myACCESS could go further to streamline scheduling of recurring meetings such as eligibility reviews, provide appointment reminders, and offer a digital pathway to distribute client feedback surveys, all of which would support participant engagement with the program by lightening the burden of navigating it.

9.C: Facilitate transparency and shared ownership of performance data.

Interviews identified data reports used by both DCF and W-2 agencies that were broken during a previous data infrastructure migration and have yet to be fixed, limiting the ability for DCF to use data transparency to promote collaborate with partner agencies. Social Finance recommends that DCF prioritizes fixes to existing reports and explores development of additional reporting to collect data on participant attrition points identified in the participant experience map shown in Appendix 5. When sharing any data across program stakeholders either within DCF or externally, we also recommend DCF supplement this data through the development and circulation of a data dictionary. By collecting and supporting understanding of information on service delivery and discussing it together with stakeholders, stakeholders can support the identification of promising approaches, reinforce support for these approaches, and seek feedback from agencies on additional supports needed to expand the impact of these successes. Furthermore, the development of ideas in a collaborative forum may contribute to greater agency ownership over the success of these initiatives.

The Ventura County Project to Support Reentry is a partnership among Social Finance, Interface Family & Community Services, and Ventura County / Board of State and Community Corrections. The project seeks to reduce recidivism, improve public safety, and promote family stability by providing comprehensive reentry support to 400 adults assigned to formal probation in Ventura County. Social Finance worked with partners to identify each operational step in the eligible to enrolled pipeline to identify where “leakages” were occurring. The teams co-created new processes to improve referrals, resulting in a 64 percent increase in enrollment. ⁴²

⁴² Social Finance. [Tackling Recidivism in Ventura County, California](#)

Conclusion and Transition to Phase 2

The assessment presented in this report seeks to capture the intricate nuances of the W-2 program. In our review, we aimed to provide DCF with actionable insights based on extensive stakeholder engagement, policy evaluations, and comparative studies. Our engagement process was driven by a focus on the program’s primary stakeholders—the participants – and their families. Their voices, complemented by the perspectives of advocacy groups and agencies, have enriched our understanding of on-the-ground realities and thus shaped our recommendations.

Leveraging the insights and feedback from this phase, our focus will shift to scoping out and launching the 2024 W-2 service provider procurement, incorporating DCF’s reflections and decisions about which recommendations to pursue based on this assessment.

As we transition to Phase 2, we remain committed to upholding the ideals of TANF, optimizing the program to strengthen the families it serves, and positioning it to support durable participant family mobility.

Appendix 1: Program Limitations List

We have compiled the following program challenges from our stakeholder interviews, which include perspectives from DCF, current and former W-2 participants, W-2 agencies, and Wisconsin advocacy groups (see Appendix 3 for the full list of interviewees). Here, they are phrased as closely as possible to what we heard. Where appropriate, they were further clarified and contextualized in the report.

This appendix table is arranged alphabetically based on the 24 categories below. To jump to a particular section, CTRL + left click on the category you want in the list.

Within each category, the challenges raised by the most stakeholders are at the top.

An "X" in each speaker column indicates that the challenge was raised by that stakeholder group: "DCF" = leadership and staff across DCF; "Part." = current and former W-2 participants; "W-2 Ag." = W-2 agencies; "Adv." = advocates. If a group is not marked as having raised a particular challenge below, it does not mean that group disagrees with the observation; the observation was simply not a focal point of discussion in the interviews or in the subsequent materials that stakeholder group shared with us.

The Recommendations column indicates which of our recommendations directly or indirectly address the challenge. We noted where there are restrictions (e.g., statutes) that would require policy changes or coordination beyond Wisconsin Works.

[Access](#)

[Education activities](#)

[Payments / sanctions](#)

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[Assessments](#)

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#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
ACCESS						
1	The intake process is too long and too complicated; it is too demanding on folks who are in crisis.	4	X	X	X	X
2	Participant-facing materials, like the W-2 Participant Agreement, can be dense and inaccessible. They tend to emphasize potential penalties rather than benefits of the program.	3	X	X	X	
3	The intake process involves many personal questions that can keep participants from completing intake.	4			X	X
4	Agencies sometimes place incremental restrictions on accessing benefits that are not in federal / state statute.	3, 4	X			X
5	Intake can be a multi-step, inefficient process, with a lot of back-and-forth between agencies and participants.	4, 9	X			X
6	Participants don't have a choice in what agency they can work with, but agencies may offer different experiences for participants.	8	X			
7	Placement-based time limit is 24 months, which is a lot shorter than the 60-month Federal time limit.	Not actionable due to state or federal law	X			
8	Program restrictions prevent more support for non-custodial parents.	6	X			
9	School enrollment verification can be a bottleneck to eligibility determination, partially because it is not required for other DHS programs and thus isn't a shared piece of data.	5	X			
10	Simplification of communication to participants is limited by statute.	Not actionable due to state or federal law	X			
11	Some verification records require money to obtain.	5		X		

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
12	Some participants experience difficulty obtaining verifications for certain activities.	5		X		
13	Some participants have more difficulty than others in providing intake verification documents.	5		X		
14	While in-person W-2 applicants benefit from staff guidance on program fit, online applicants may not have received an orientation to the program before applying. Some agencies believe this has contributed to more applications from participants that ultimately will be found ineligible, but still need to be processed by agency staff.	3			X	
15	Some participants do not show up for their appointments.	5, 7			X	
ACTIVITIES						
16	Assigned activities are not all aligned to career goals.	7	X	X		X
17	People feel pressured to do activities to not lose benefits, even though those activities are not beneficial.	7	X	X		X
18	Assigned activities don't prepare people for jobs that support participants to be upwardly mobile.	7	X			X
19	Caseworkers are required to put people into activities right away even if they may not be ready.	4			X	X
20	Participants have too many responsibilities to juggle (school, job, W-2 activities, family etc.).	7	X	X		
21	Activity logs do not account for travel time between activities.	3		X		
22	Some participants are not guided by their caseworkers to understand what can and cannot be counted towards activity hours.	7		X		

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
23	Participants that go to school full-time are still required to do intensive job search.	7		X		
24	Participants need more recovery time after having a baby before being required to complete a full load of activities.	4		X		
25	Verifications for missing activities after the loss of a loved one are challenging to provide during a difficult time.	5, 7		X		
26	Caseworker told participant that they needed to pass particular activities (skills tests) as a condition for receiving monthly cash assistance.	7		X		
27	Work experience opportunities did not match up with participant's area of interest and/or background.	7		X		
28	Work experience was not created with the intention to lead to a full-time hire.	6, 7		X		
29	Agencies don't always feel like they have the flexibility to use good cause to not assign activities for participants.	2, 6			X	
30	Difficult for agencies to assign relevant activities due to time limits (doing an activity for too long, even if they need to, does not count towards WPR).	Not actionable due to state or federal law			X	
31	Activities allowed by laws and statutes aren't those that prepare people for jobs that enable them to be upwardly mobile.	Not actionable due to state or federal law				X
32	It can be difficult for agencies to identify programming / activities for W-2T participants that will count as work experience.	6, 7				X
33	For individuals experiencing homelessness and those moving from crisis to crisis, job search is often far from what they're ready for.	6, 7				X

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
ASSESSMENTS						
34	Assessment results are not considered in crafting employability plans and connecting participants to other supportive services.	5, 7, 9	X	X		
35	It is difficult for caseworkers to get some participants to complete the career assessments within the defined timeline of 30 days.	5, 7			X	
36	When speaking with their caseworker, participants could downplay barriers, family situations (etc.), resulting in inappropriate activity assignment or not having timely service referrals.	5, 7				X
37	Placement in W-2T does not always translate to a participant receiving SSI/SSDI benefits.	6, 7				X
BUDGETING						
38	Support of agency innovation is limited by budget restrictions, including the State’s budget system and the misalignment between the contract budget year and state fiscal year.	Not actionable due to state or federal law	X			
39	Agencies can do more to serve participants with the money they have.	1	X			
40	Some agencies leave money on the table that they could be using for participant incentives and/or support services.	1	X			
41	It is often challenging to spend down MOE and to keep spending within annual timing.	1	X			
42	It is difficult for agency leadership to balance budgeting for what can be reimbursed or not, and be able to spend down everything within the time limit.	1			X	

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
43	Being understaffed results in an agency not being able to spend down their full cost reimbursement budget.	1			X	
44	It is time-consuming for agencies to make staff timesheets align with budget line items.	1			X	
45	With split budget allocation periods, agencies are only paid for performance up to a certain % in the first 6 months. They cannot make it up in the second period if they are under.	Not actionable due to state or federal law			X	
46	The focus on compliance discourages agencies from experimenting and trying new approaches.	1			X	
CASE MANAGEMENT						
47	It is difficult for participants to get in touch with their caseworker or get a timely response.	5, 7	X	X		X
48	Some participants feel mistreated and unsupported by their caseworkers.	5, 7	X	X		X
49	Participants often don't know what their options are and they must rely on agencies to share that information.	3, 7	X	X		
50	Workers may not have both the people and data entry skill sets, only one or the other.	2, 7	X		X	
51	Workers experience burnout.	2, 7	X		X	
52	Activity / employability planning is one size fits all.	7	X			X
53	Utilization of prorated Community Service Job (CSJ) placements, which could be beneficial for folks at specific stages, is limited by program restrictions.	4			X	X
54	Some caseworkers are not consistent with conducting eligibility reviews every 6 months.	5, 7	X			

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
55	Participants are required to take some assessments in-person with workers.	7	X			
56	Caseworker turnover can result in disrupted services and lost data.	2		X		
57	Participants identified an inconsistent service experience across caseworkers.	5, 7		X		
58	Caseworkers sometimes do not account for someone's background (criminal background, college degree etc.) when suggesting career pathways and training programs.	7		X		
59	Caseworker does not check in with a participant when a sanction occurs, or before it does.	2, 7		X		
60	Agency offers resources/tools but some agencies don't always have staff onsite to assist with guiding folks on how to use these tools.	7		X		
61	W2-T placements don't work well with federal work requirements given folks' disabilities and additional barriers.	7			X	
62	Some agencies are not providing enough support for Case Management Follow-Up placements.	4, 7				X
CONTRACT						
63	12-year contract length is too long.	1	X			
64	There are different population challenges and access issues between Milwaukee (MKE) and the balance of the state (BOS), but agencies have the same contract and expectations.	7			X	
65	The process of evaluating and awarding contracts could be more transparent.	1				X
CUSTOMER FEEDBACK						
66	Customer feedback survey has low response rate, might involve biased / polarized responses.	8	X		X	

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
67	The program lacks an accessible complaint procedure at the DCF level for applicants and participants to use.	8				X
DATA REPORTING						
68	Agencies cannot monitor their caseloads and WPR effectively on a day-to-day basis due to missing data reports.	9	X		X	
69	There are limitations internally to collecting and leveraging automation data to better understand performance.	9	X			
70	It is difficult to reflect on whether a change had a positive impact when changes happen so frequently.	1	X			
71	Data on outcomes (e.g., wages) are not housed in DCF data systems.	9	X			
72	There is a steep learning curve to understand W-2 program data structures, processes, and quality.	4, 9	X			
73	Agencies don't have a data user guide to clarify field definitions and support higher-quality data collection.	9	X			
74	Caseworkers must ask participants for a lot of personal information to complete assessments, but often participants are not told how that information will be used.	4, 9	X			
75	Systems were not designed around agency accountability. If a participant succeeds, DCF is unable to tell if it was because the agency was providing good services or because the participant found employment despite poor services.	9	X			
76	Limited data is available to help understand different ways that participants exit the program.	9	X			

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
DCF RELATIONSHIP						
77	State needs to be clearer about priorities in order to minimize the need for agencies to frequently rebuild/change program operations.	3			X	
78	Some agencies feel there is a tension between doing what is best for the participant vs. doing what is correct from a monitoring perspective.	1			X	
79	Some agencies experience a lack of clarity on what is state vs federal vs program requirements, and what DCF's goals are for changes to program policy or contractual requirements.	3			X	
80	When DCF implements changes, some agencies still feel pressure to maintain expertise on old systems and staff focus on prior requirements in case those items are re-prioritized in the future.	3			X	
81	Some agencies see a need for DCF to partner with other state departments to coordinate service delivery more effectively.	6			X	
EDUCATION ACTIVITIES						
82	Federal restrictions say that some education activities are not core activities.	Not actionable due to state or federal law	X			
83	Certain education programs are not eligible to be counted towards activities. Participants would need to complete schoolwork on top of the 40-hr activity requirements.	Not actionable due to state or federal law		X		
84	Requirement for full-time education prevents agency from referring folks to part-time programs at technical colleges.	Not actionable due to state or federal law			X	
85	Only 5 technical colleges are approved for education activities.	4			X	

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE						
86	Emergency assistance is not high enough.	Not actionable due to state or federal law	X		X	X
87	Participants need to have an eviction notice in order to receive an emergency assistance payment for housing.	Not actionable due to state or federal law	X			
88	An emergency assistance application is denied if a participant owes more rent than they can receive through emergency assistance.	Not actionable due to state or federal law	X			
89	Verification timeline of 5 days is too short. Emergency assistance is often used to address housing barriers, but it can be hard to find documents necessary for confirming eligibility while homeless / at risk of homelessness.	Not actionable due to state or federal law			X	
EMERGENCY PAYMENTS						
90	Access to emergency payments varies based on the caseworker / agency policy. Some participants did not know about this service or did not receive this support. Sometimes it was too little, too late.	2, 3	X	X		X
91	Agencies lack clarity on emergency payment restrictions.	2, 3			X	
INCENTIVES						
92	Portion of the budget associated with cost reimbursement expenses and performance payments fluctuated too frequently, resulting in additional operational challenges for agencies.	1	X		X	
93	Agencies receive performance-based payments even when participants find jobs on their own.	1	X			
94	The introduction of performance outcomes payments (POP) claims shifted the relationship between DCF and agencies to focus more on the money.	1	X			

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
95	The use of POP claims has not resulted in more meaningful outcomes for participants.	1	X			
96	Overachieving agencies cannot get more performance-based payments beyond what is allocated for each period.	1	X			
97	If agencies do not earn all of their POP allocation, their budget for the following year is at risk of reduction.	1	X			
98	Agencies find the child support liaison incentive particularly difficult to achieve.	6	X			
99	POPs are structured in a way that effectively predetermines DCF's expectations of agencies; POPs don't add meaningful incentives for agencies to exceed expectations in delivering W-2 services.	1	X			
100	Current performance metrics are not able to reflect and reward integrated service delivery (i.e., beyond simple referrals, leveraging dollars beyond W-2 for connected services).	1			X	
101	Current metrics do not consider the work required to effectively serve populations with higher barriers (refugees, ESL etc.).	1			X	
102	Communications and silo challenges with child support offices make it difficult for someone in the child support liaison role to be effective.	6			X	
103	There should be more agency incentives for getting folks into education and training. Training programs are currently not cost-reimbursable.	4			X	
104	Some agencies experience difficulty getting participants to share or update their employment info (for POP claim purposes).	7			X	
105	Participant incentives are currently coming out of the same pool as the agency's service delivery dollars.	1			X	

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
LEARNFARE						
106	Learnfare is challenging and does not support families to achieve better outcomes.	Not actionable due to state or federal law		X		
107	Learnfare lacks sufficient funding and is demanding on staff.	Not actionable due to state or federal law			X	
MONITORING						
108	Monitors for BOS and MKE do not report to the same people, making it more difficult to align approaches.	7	X			
109	Monitoring tools are not consistently being used to support monitors' conversations with agencies.	1	X			
110	Assessment of some monitoring metrics involves subjectivity.	1	X			
111	Monitoring 2.0 introduced a shift in expectations for the role of regionals.	1	X			
112	Lack of clarity on definitions (e.g. emergency payments, placements, work experience) increases work for agency staff during monitoring responses.	3			X	
113	Case management quality may not be fully captured in employability plans and case comments, despite this being the focus of monitors.	9			X	
114	There is a high demand on staff time to complete monitoring activities, esp. during the 10 days to respond for sampled cases.	1			X	
115	Monitoring scoring does not provide consideration for understandable circumstances surrounding missing documentation.	1			X	
116	Monitoring report formats make it difficult to read/process comments during 10-day timeframe.	1			X	

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
117	Monitoring does not account for challenges already frequently communicated and acknowledged by the agency.	1			X	
118	There are some instances for prorated CSJs where one data entry error results in it being instantly marked as a monitoring performance failure.	1, 9			X	
119	Monitoring considers a formal assessment without a date as an error, often while participants are working on scheduling the assessment.	1, 9			X	
120	Some agency staff needs more support from regionals to understand program policies.	3			X	
OUTCOMES						
121	Some participants had to find jobs on their own with minimal or no support from their caseworker.	1, 7	X	X		X
122	W-2 is not delivering meaningful outcomes for many participants.	1	X			X
123	Current metrics do not take into account whether jobs participants obtained are quality jobs with a gainful wage and potential for career advancement.	1	X			X
124	Self-employment / entrepreneurship is not considered a job outcome.			X		X
125	W-2 is only reaching a small percentage of eligible households.	3	X			
126	Asset limits rarely prevent program participation through eligibility determination, but instead present an intrusive verification process that results in applicants falling out of the intake process.	Not actionable due to state or federal law	X			

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
127	There are no clear next steps after some training programs for someone to attain a job and progress on that career pathway.	5, 7		X		
128	Some participants are not able to hold onto jobs because of the job quality or sometimes hostile working environment.	1, 7		X		
129	There are not always clear steps after training programs to support participants in the licensing process, resulted in wasted training time and lack of job attainment.	4, 7		X		
130	Some in-house trainings offered by W-2 agencies are not recognized beyond a limited number of employer partners, which may limit job opportunities for participants.	4				X
PARTICIPANT-RELATED BARRIER						
131	Program requires you to have a job before you can get childcare support.	Not actionable due to state or federal law		X		X
132	Program restrictions limit the ability to address systemic factors that pose numerous barriers to participants.	4, 6, 7	X			
133	Childcare is particularly limited in the Northwestern part of the state.	4, 6, 7	X			
134	Participants experience difficulty finding housing.	4, 6, 7		X		
135	Participants experience difficulty performing job search activities, especially when they have criminal records background or have limited job experience /job skills.	4, 6, 7		X		
136	Participants experience difficulty accessing transportation, both through job search and after placement.	4, 6, 7		X		

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
137	Participants experience challenges associated with substance use.	4, 6, 7		X		
138	Participants experience difficulty accessing childcare.	4, 6, 7		X		
139	Participants experience challenges associated with disability.	4, 6, 7		X		
140	Participants experience mental health challenges; supports including referrals to services vary in quality.	4, 6, 7		X		
141	Participants experience difficulty managing their children while holding down a job.	4, 6, 7		X		
142	Individuals experiencing homelessness while enrolled in W-2 may be required to go through the process of transferring agencies when establishing housing which may result in a lapse in services.	4, 6, 7				X
PARTNERSHIPS						
143	Some agencies perceive other W-2 agencies as competitors, rather than as partners for sharing ideas and best practices.	6, 8	X		X	
144	Agencies could do more to leverage local resources and partnerships.	6		X		X
145	The use of community steering committees by agencies is limited.	5	X			
146	Agency sometimes terminates services or programs even when there is participant need for them, and does not effectively communicate the rationale nor next steps for participants.	5, 7		X		
147	Some agencies experience difficulty finding employer partners committed to providing full-time opportunities after work experience.	6			X	

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
148	Agencies have limited connections to prevention services and systems (for legal aid, homelessness, substance use etc.).	6				X
149	The technical college system is underutilized despite its proven outcomes.	4				X
PAYMENTS / SANCTIONS						
150	Monthly cash assistance is not high enough.	Not actionable due to state or federal law	X	X	X	X
151	First cash assistance payment is only a partial payment and it takes about 1.5 months to receive it.	Not actionable due to state or federal law	X	X	X	
152	Some participants are not guided by their caseworkers to understand why they are sanctioned; appealing the sanction and receiving an adjustment can take a lot of time.	7, 8		X		X
153	Sanctions are high, due in part to them being automatic.	2	X			
154	Agencies have an inconsistent approach to sanctioning.	2, 3	X			
155	If receiving child support or other benefits, that amount is deducted from W-2 paycheck.	Not actionable due to state or federal law		X		
156	Deduction of child support or other benefits from W-2 paycheck is not clear / well understood.	3		X		
157	Some participants have faced restrictions on what types of work are allowed.	3		X		
158	Participants are not always able to make up for missing documentation in order to get sanction removed.	2		X		
159	W-2 payment is cut off as soon as someone gets a job.	2, 5			X	

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
160	Receiving a partial payment for even one day uses up one month of a participant's time limit.	Not actionable due to state or federal law			X	
161	Sanctions of \$5/hour is more than what a participant "earns" hourly from cash assistance by participating.	Not actionable due to state or federal law			X	
162	There are so many different ways that lead to someone being sanctioned.	8				X
163	The program's focus on fraud detection makes it difficult for program stakeholders to show understanding to challenges that participants face.	3				X
PROGRAM DELIVERY PHILOSOPHY						
164	There is too much focus on data entry and compliance over quality case management and support.	2	X		X	X
165	Some agencies are cautious about sharing participant incentives, especially when those incentives come out of their budget for service delivery.	1	X			
166	Agency innovation is limited.	1	X			
167	It can be difficult to encourage participants to consider long-term impact when they are moving from crisis to crisis.	4	X			
168	Agencies' focus on budget may come at the expense of participant/family-focused service delivery.	1	X			
169	Some agencies are reluctant to implement BWF's recommendations because of differences in program philosophy.	3	X			
170	Program penalizes participants through sanctions instead of rewarding them for the activities they do complete.	Not actionable due to state or federal law			X	

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
PROGRAM NARRATIVE						
171	W-2 does not have a strong identity / purpose in the community because there are different perceptions about whether it is a work program, a safety net program, or both.	3	X			X
172	Participants may not perceive the program as beneficial when there are other ways of making a living with fewer requirements.	3	X	X		
173	W-2 has a negative brand perception for participants.	3			X	
174	W-2 doesn't have much positive word-of-mouth due to varying quality of support and outcomes.	3				X
STAFF TRAINING AND RETENTION						
175	Workers' pay is not enough, making it hard to expect more from them even with better training and program changes.	2, 7	X		X	
176	It takes at least one year to be a competent FEP and gain enough hands-on experience.	2	X		X	
177	New working training focuses on data entry over hands-on training.	2	X		X	
178	Staff turnover and restructuring across teams presented a challenge to data improvements.	9	X			
179	Agencies don't always have the right talent to fill quality assurance (QA) manager positions, and may promote / move staff laterally even when they are not a good fit for the role.	2	X			
180	Training provided to new workers doesn't cover how to advise clients to seek the right resources.	2, 3	X			

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
181	There is high turnover of caseworkers due to monitoring demand. Staff sometimes quit before finishing training because it is not what they expected, especially trainees who thought the program would be more focused on social work and case management.	2			X	
182	Some agencies find it difficult to cultivate tenured staff since some don't respond well to new/frequent shifts in monitoring requirements.	2			X	
183	Some agencies find it difficult to manage caseload / stay below required caseload ratios (80 cases for one caseworker) with high staff turnover, which in turn impacts the customer experience.	2			X	
184	There is no central hub for new workers to turn to for guidance as training can come from different directions and levels: DCF new worker training, DCF operations memos, agency SOPs and organization materials etc.	2			X	
185	Participants hired as staff by agencies are not always set up for success.	2				X
SUPPORTIVE SERVICES / REFERRALS						
186	It is unclear to some participants what supportive services are available to them.	3, 6, 8		X		
187	Some participants need more help finding affordable activities and afterschool programs for their children.	6		X		
188	The program doesn't offer enough support for single fathers.	6		X		
189	It is sometimes unclear to participants and potential participants what programs are available to them and how different state programs work together.	3, 6, 8				X

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
SYSTEMS / AUTOMATION						
190	Collecting information on individuals requires data entry across three to four different systems, which is difficult for caseworkers to navigate and keep track of, sometimes resulting in duplicative work and additional data cleaning.	9	X		X	
191	Premature / automatic case closure can happen without any explanation or notification to the participant.	2		X		X
192	FoodShare, medical assistance, and other Income Maintenance programs could be more connected to W-2.	6	X			
193	Quality data is being collected, but not always effectively integrated into key decision making.	9	X			
194	Mutually beneficial data is not always shared across state departments.	9	X			
195	Automation may be working to address participant challenges that could be solved instead through greater engagement from caseworkers.	7, 9	X			
196	Many activity codes have been created over the years with slight variation, but there isn't clarity on what the variation should reflect.	4	X			
197	Program requires agencies to have a strong QA team to check eligibility, verifications, and POP claims, which is resource intensive.	1			X	
198	System is not set up for whole-family data collection and reporting. Whole-family information, or information that could help participants support children / participant children service needs, is only collected in comment fields.	9			X	
199	Restrictions on the use of participant data make it difficult for some agencies to use creative ways to engage with participants (e.g., text message reminders).	8, 9			X	

#	Description	Recommendation	Speaker			
			DCF	Part.	W-2 Ag.	Adv.
200	Some agencies are not able to claim their POP earnings due to data entry errors.	1, 3			X	
201	Employability Plans require caseworkers to work with participants at enrollment to set specific, detailed, and time-based employment goals. This timing may not be right for some participants who are in crisis, but workers are required to populate these fields to proceed to the next page.	9			X	

Appendix 2: Current Agency Highlights

Below are examples of innovation and process improvement from our conversations with W-2 agencies.

#	Category	Description
1	Activities	Agency added social service-oriented programming including peer mentoring, first-aid courses, mental health courses, family events, and variety of vocational classes in response to community needs (unclear how or if participant feedback was collected to identify community needs).
2	Activities	Agency provides additional programming such as first-time home ownership program, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship programs.
3	Assessments	To encourage timely completion, the agency attached a participant incentive to both the education and career assessments. Those assessments are also completed in separate sessions to help reduce the length of each appointment.
4	Assessments	Agency introduced additional assessments/surveys that allow participants to self-identify their most immediate needs so that their caseworker can connect them to resources in a timely way.
5	Case management	Agency provides participants with a tablet with data and Wi-Fi plan covered by the agency, which has pre-installed apps such as FoodFinder and myACCESS.
6	Data reporting	Agency developed internal tools and dashboards to track the status of Performance Outcome Payment (POP) claims.
7	Data reporting	Agency created their own employment verification form to streamline the POP claims process.
8	Incentives	Agency shares a portion of POP payments with staff and participants.
9	Intake	Agency developed an internal scheduling tool and trained staff to move up appointments when there are no-shows. This helps accelerate eligibility timelines for participants who are engaged / available.
10	Intake	Agency implemented a check-in system with iPads that asks for the primary reason for visit, which allows for tracking of traffic data as well as type of visit.
11	Intake	Agency attaches a participant incentive to the completion of the enrollment process (including all verifications).
12	Monitoring	Some agencies developed an internal monitoring tool on top of what is provided by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) so that their Quality Assurance (QA) team can perform checks proactively.

#	Category	Description
13	Partnerships	Agency worked with employer partners to update job descriptions to better reflect actual job requirements and unlock more opportunities for W-2 participants.
14	Partnerships	Agency partnered with a local employer who opened a location in the same building and could host training/job sites for participants.
15	Program delivery philosophy	Agency is working towards a whole-family case management approach, where the agency considers a participant family's needs in an effort to remove the participant's barriers to work, by 1) ensuring that staff are properly trained and understand how to link resources, 2) offer events for the whole family (i.e., incl. resources and referrals for children), and 3) invest money in services for family trauma.
16	Program delivery philosophy	Agency trains and certifies all staff in a framework that is oriented around participants and helping them get closer to their career goals (Transition to Success).
17	Program narrative	Some agencies work on improving the culture of the W-2 program by changing what participants experience when going into the agency's building (e.g., adjusting room layout, how staff are positioned when talking to participants).
18	Staff training and retention	As part of their training for staff, the agency places all new hires, irrespective of their role, at the agency front desk to get experience interacting with participants.
19	Staff training and retention	Agency requires their staff to complete new courses and trainings that are available to participants so that they can better explain them and understand when to offer them.
20	Staff training and retention	Agency prefers QA staff to have prior case management experience to have a more nuanced understanding of the participant's experience. Agency would internally promote case managers when appropriate.
21	Staff training and retention	Some agencies have specialized teams for eligibility and quality assurance.
22	Staff training and retention	Agency has new workers shadow other workers and get reverse-shadowed by a team lead to practice in a more hands-on way.
23	Staff training and retention	Some agencies provide trauma-informed care training for staff led by a licensed professional.
24	Supportive services	Agency has an on-site food pantry that is stocked by national and local companies, serving 50 - 60 families per day.
25	Supportive services	Some agencies provide on-site services that allow participants to get help with domestic violence situations discreetly and conveniently.

Appendix 3: Interviews Conducted

We conducted 64 interviews (76 total hours) with Department of Children and Families (DCF) staff including the Bureau of Working Families (BWF), the Bureau of Analytics and Research (BAR), and other agency administrators; W-2 agencies; current and former W-2 participants; Wisconsin community advocates; national Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) experts; and TANF program experts in other states.

Date	Stakeholder Group	Organization / Affiliation	Attendee(s)
3/1/2023	DCF	Bureau of Working Families (BWF)	Jessica Moss (Section Manager, Program Integrity Customer Service Section)
3/1/2023	DCF	BWF	Laura O'Flanagan (Section Manager, TANF Automation Section), Heidi Hammes (IS Business Analyst Conslt/Admin), Jane Kahl (IS Business Analyst Specialist)
3/1/2023	DCF	BWF	Linda Richardson (Section Manager, Contract Administration Section)
3/1/2023	DCF	Bureau of Analytics and Research (BAR)	Loralie Wiebold (Section Manager, Research and Evaluation)
3/1/2023	DCF	BWF	MacArthur Strawder (Section Manager, Milwaukee Operations Section)
3/1/2023	DCF	BWF	Patara Horn (Director, Bureau of Working Families)
3/1/2023	DCF	BWF	Tonya Kristiansen (Section Manager, TANF Policy Section)
3/1/2023	Advocate	Kids Forward	Jon Peacock (Research Director)
3/2/2023	DCF	Department of Children and Families (DCF)	Connie Chesnik (Administrator, Division of Family & Economic Security)
3/2/2023	Agency	Equus	Kanwen Shao (W-2 Project Director) and team
3/2/2023	Agency	Forward Service Corp (FSC)	Tony Dziedzic (Director of Operations) and team
3/3/2023	Agency	America Works	Carlyle Outten (W-2 Director), Vangpao Lee (W-2 Project Manager), and team
3/3/2023	Advocate	Legal Action of Wisconsin	Brittany Schoenick (Attorney), Matt Hayes (Milwaukee Benefits Unit Supervisor)
3/9/2023	Advocate	Community Advocates	Julie Kersick (Senior Policy Advocate)
3/15/2023	Agency	FSC	Tony Dziedzic (Director of Operations) and Performance Outcomes Payments (POP) Claims staff
3/23/2023	DCF	BAR	Danise Doudna (IS Business Analyst Conslt/Admin, Admin and Program Support)
3/23/2023	DCF	BAR	Maggie Renno (Director, Bureau of Analytics and Research)
3/23/2023	DCF	BWF	Heidi Hammes (IS Business Analyst Conslt/Admin, TANF Automation Section)
3/28/2023	DCF	BWF	Jane Kahl (IS Business Analyst Specialist, TANF Automation Section)
4/4/2023	DCF	Secretary's Office	Brenda Rodriguez (Dir. Office of Urban Development, Community & Family Outreach)

Date	Stakeholder Group	Organization / Affiliation	Attendee(s)
4/21/2023	Agency	America Works	Intake team
4/26/2023	Advocate	Anonymous	Anonymous
4/28/2023	DCF	BWF	Jessica Moss (Section Manager, Program Integrity Customer Service Section)
5/4/2023	Advocate	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	Donna Pavetti (Senior Fellow, TANF)
5/10/2023	Advocate	American Public Human Services Association (APHSA)	Matt Lyons (Director of Practice), Rebekah Sides (Policy Associate)
5/25/2023	Advocate	Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WisCAP)	Brad Paul (Executive Director)
5/25/2023	Advocate	Legal Action of Wisconsin	Pat DeLessio (Former Staff Attorney)
5/28/2023	DCF	BWF	Jane Kahl (IS Business Analyst Specialist, TANF Automation Section)
6/6/2023	Advocate	Wisconsin Trust Account Foundation (WisTAF)	Rebecca Murray (Executive Director)
6/12/2023	Agency	Workforce Resource Inc. (WRI)	Jody Conner (Program Manager) and team
6/12/2023	Participant	WRI Focus Group - Eau Claire	9 participants
6/13/2023	Agency	Workforce Connections Inc. (WCI)	Gina Brown (Executive Director) and team
6/13/2023	Participant	FSC Focus Groups - Wausau	5 participants
6/13/2023	Participant	WCI Focus Group - La Crosse	3 participants
6/14/2023	Advocate	WisCAP	Jonathan Bader (Policy & Programs Director), Andy Heidt (Program Manager - Housing Policy and Programs), Heidi O'Brien (Program Manager - Economic Renewal)
6/14/2023	DCF	BAR	Maggie Renno (Director, Bureau of Analytics and Research)
6/15/2023	Agency	UMOS	Parker Rios (Vice President - Workforce Development & Human Resources), Sandra Salazar (W-2 Deputy Director), and team
6/15/2023	Agency	Ross Innovative Employment Solutions	Nicole Hagen (Project Director) and team
6/15/2023	Participant	America Works Focus Groups	28 participants
6/15/2023	Participant	Ross Focus Group	5 participants
6/15/2023	Legislator	Wisconsin House of Representatives	Rep. Francesca Hong
6/15/2023	Legislator	Wisconsin House of Representatives	Rep. Patrick Snyder, Sam Hope (Leg. Asst.)
6/16/2023	DCF	BWF	Brianna Chaffee (Contract Manager, Contract Administration Section)
6/16/2023	Agency	Maximus	Rachel Zietlow (Lead Vice President, US Services) and team
6/16/2023	Participant	Maximus Focus Group	6 participants

Date	Stakeholder Group	Organization / Affiliation	Attendee(s)
6/21/2023	Advocate	Hope House	Wendy Weckler (Executive Director)
6/23/2023	Advocate	Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)	Holly Kaster (Former YWCA W-2 Director)
6/23/2023	DCF	DCF	Wendy Henderson (Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence)
6/27/2023	Advocate	Hunger Task Force	Sherrie Tussler (Executive Director)
6/28/2023	Advocate	Tribal TANF - Forest County Potawatomi Community	Katheryn Tupper (Staff from Potawatomi Economic Support Department)
6/29/2023	DCF	Division of Management Services	Tyler Oettinger (Section Manager, Quality Review & Performance Analysis Section)
7/6/2023	Cross-State	American Public Human Services Association (APHSA)	Mary Nelson (Director of Practice), Rebekah Sides (Policy Associate), Capria Lee (Project Associate)
7/7/2023	Cross-State	MA Department of Transitional Assistance	Megan Nicholls (Associate Commissioner of Family and Economic Assistance), Kamaria Moore-Hollis (Director of Economic Mobility)
7/11/2023	Cross-State	Third Sector	Maria Posey (Managing Director of Federal Business Development)
7/11/2023	Cross-State	Dakota County Community Services	Linda Bixby (Deputy Director of Employment and Economic Assistance), Kate Lerner (Director of Operations), Jenny Douville (Manager of Pathways to Prosperity), Marti Fishbach (Community Services Director)
7/20/2023	Advocates	League of Women Voters of Wisconsin	Debra Cronmiller (Executive Director)
7/21/2023	Advocates	Impact Inc.	Emily Kenney (Systems Change Director)
7/28/2023	Advocate	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	Donna Pavetti (Senior Fellow, TANF)
8/7/2023	Participant	Virtual focus group	3 participants
8/8/2023	Participant	Virtual focus group	4 participants
8/10/2023	DHS	Wisconsin Department of Health Services	Tonya Evans (Bureau Director, Milwaukee Enrollment Services), Mike Poma (Associate Director), Tim McGuire (Associate Director)
8/11/2023	Participant	Virtual focus group	3 participants
8/18/2023	Cross-State	Tennessee Department of Human Services	Clarence Carter (Commissioner), Cherrell Campbell-Street (Assistant Commissioner)

Appendix 4: Cross-State Policy Inventory

In an effort to learn about emerging and innovative practices in other TANF programs, our team conducted a landscape analysis of ideas across states. We began by developing a list of innovations through conversations with DCF, national TANF experts (e.g., American Public Human Services Association), Wisconsin stakeholders (e.g., advocates), and desktop research. Afterwards, we explored each innovation through meetings with state TANF agencies (MA Department of Transitional Assistance, MN Department Dakota County) and desktop research, and we aligned each idea to one of the recommendation categories included in this report. Our goal with this work is to help expand the thinking about what may be possible in Wisconsin; where other programs have succeeded and failed in driving a greater orientation towards outcomes; and which transformation strategies are gaining traction.

In addition, our team also conducted research on TANF outcome metrics, including measures from both other federal workforce programs (e.g., WIOA) and state TANF programs. These metrics are related to employment, education / training, and earnings / wages. Both research findings are included for reference below.

Research on Cross-State TANF Innovations:

State	Innovation / Policy	Description	Benefits	Challenges to Implementation
<i>Incentives / Funding</i>				
North Carolina ⁴³	Adult and youth participant incentive programs	Lincoln County (NC) provides two incentive programs, targeted at Adults and Youth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Incentive Program – The program’s aim is to reward participants for job readiness, skill advancement and extra effort put forth in their search for permanent employment and self-sufficiency. Incentives are in the form of gift cards. • Youth Incentive Program - Although less structured, the program’s incentives are similar to the adult program and given to youth when progress is made toward achieving their educational goals. Social workers engage youths aged 14 and up to begin the discussion and goal planning for their future. The program places an emphasis on education, or the work experience needed to achieve their future goals and dreams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential to increase retention of participants in program through increased value proposition ▪ Specific benefits and support for youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In tension with current agency budgeting practices ▪ May require build-out of youth-focused programming or developing new partnerships with youth-focused providers
North Carolina ⁴⁴	Effort to mitigate the “Cliff Effect” for benefits across federal programs	Wilson County (NC) is in the process of requesting a federal demonstration waiver to disregard TANF incentive payments as countable income for federal programs (SNAP, Medicaid, housing assistance) – whether federal, state or private – for participants partaking in certain other state benefit programs. This waiver hopes to mitigate the “Cliff Effect” where federal programs work against each other in helping the participant rather than as a collective transition out of poverty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transitional support for participants and / or reduced impact of the “Cliff Effect” ▪ Removes disincentive for enrolling participants in beneficial income support programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Difficult to gain approval from state / federal leaders
Ohio ⁴⁵	Placement and retention incentives for direct placements in on-the-job training	The state’s Work Incentive Program allows for providers to earn placement and retention incentives for TANF eligible individuals placed in on-the-job training or directly into unsubsidized employment. There are additional incentive payments that may be earned for individuals that remain employed at 90 and 180 days (to achieve retention incentives, the on-the-job training component must have ended, and employment must have been maintained for at least 90 or 180 days from the initial placement date). The placement and retention incentives are similar in some ways to Performance Outcome Payments, though they are incentives, rather than a base share of agency budgets as POPs are.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential to increase retention of participants in program by rewarding good provider behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unclear if meets statutory performance-based contracting requirements if only incentive driven

⁴³ North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. [2022-2025 State TANF Plan](#).

⁴⁴ North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. [2022-2025 State TANF Plan](#).

⁴⁵ Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services. [TANF State Plan for Public Comment](#).

Staff Training				
Utah ⁴⁶	Development of caseworker training modules	Utah contracts with the University of Utah's Social Research Institute to provide data and survey information measuring basic demographics, family histories (including childhood adversity and trauma), employment and educational strengths and barriers, and overall experiences with FEP staff and FEP program components. The Social Research Institute assisted in the development of FEP caseworker training modules reflecting the challenges and strengths of the FEP customer including trauma-informed approaches, executive functioning skills, motivational interviewing, human development and case management. This data, collected at periodic intervals, tracks differences between the general Family Employment Program population and other groups such as WIOA participants and the general Utah population. This data is used to track changes in the population over time and to inform program and policy development and implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uses data to inform program decisions ▪ Increased effectiveness of and wider topics covered in caseworker training ▪ Could drive better alignment with other workforce development programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Must recruit academic partner ▪ Requires time and effort from external stakeholders ▪ May require new funding
State Agency Process / Support				
Minnesota ⁴⁷	Asset limit and distribution of EBT cards	The asset limit for Minnesota's cash assistance program is \$10,000. Additionally, cash assistance is provided on EBT cards, alongside food benefits. Several other states interviewed also indicated that they provide cash assistance on EBT cards to ease access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased cash assistance for participants ▪ Faster access to needed benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limitations placed by state statute
North Carolina ⁴⁸	Statewide coordinated care network	NCCARE360, the first statewide coordinated care network, was recently launched to electronically connect people with basic resources, like housing. The system has a feedback loop on the outcome of that connection. NC recognized that people face a fragmented system of health and human services that can be hard to navigate. Providers often operate in silos and have no meaningful way of coordinating services for local residents. NCCARE360 holds a robust statewide resource directory that includes a call center with dedicated navigators, a data team verifying resources, and text and chat capabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Helps break down siloes between human service agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires funding for technical solution ▪ Lengthy implementation period
Service Provider Process				
Montana ⁴⁹	Barrier reduction and screening approach	The Montana TANF Family Bridge Model – which will be used as an overarching framework that informs program design, family screening and assessment, and outcome tracking – has a rating scale to determine the level of concern for an individual or family based on the categories within the model. Agencies are expected to use the Bridge model to determine appropriate barrier reduction and screening approaches. Screening results are then used to define the level of engagement and Employability/Service plan, which a client advocate will support the family in implementing. The Montana TANF Family Bridge Model will be a central tool in the Montana Pathway Program's universal service delivery model. The Family Bridge Model outlines factors associated with family stability, employability, and financial security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved barrier identification and remediation • Person-centered approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development and implementation (e.g., training) of a new tool / process • Requires more tailored approach to each family, which necessitate more time from staff
North Carolina ⁵⁰	Mental health screening during intake	Many applicants and recipients to North Carolina's Work First may be hesitant to self-report mental health challenges they do not recognize the symptoms, or they want to avoid the possible stigma and consequences. To assist in the identification of mental health concerns all Work First applicants and recipients may volunteer to complete a mental health screening. (The mental health screening is not a condition of eligibility.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mitigate barriers to increase the probability of participants obtaining and retaining employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Additional time and resources ▪ Potential stigma around mental health
Minnesota ⁵¹	Whole-family intensive, collaborative case management	Since 2003, the Partnership for Family Success (PFS) program in Anoka County, Minnesota, has provided family-based team case management to individuals served by multiple programs and departments. The PFS team is made up of workers from various Human Services Departments, including Corrections, Community Health and Environmental Health Services, Community Social Services and Mental Health, Income Maintenance, and the Workforce Center (which operates the Vocational Rehabilitation program and provides employment and training services to WIA job seekers and TANF recipients). Screening for participant barriers and planning to mitigate those barriers is much more intensive than in most other TANF programs. During weekly two-hour meetings, the team discusses clients' service strategies, makes recommendations, and identifies ways to strengthen service delivery through integrated policies and procedures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Model collaborative case management approach ▪ Increase participant's ability to effectively navigate and benefit from multiple programs / initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource intensive ▪ Interventions sometimes at odds with Workforce Participation Rate

⁴⁶ Utah Department of Workforce Services (2020). [Utah's TANF State Plan](#).

⁴⁷ Minnesota Department of Human Services. [Minnesota Family Investment Program \(MFIP\)](#).

⁴⁸ North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. [2022-2025 State TANF Plan](#).

⁴⁹ Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (2021). [State of Montana TANF Plan](#).

⁵⁰ North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. [Work First Substance Use/Mental Health Initiative](#).

⁵¹ Mathematica (2011). [Effective Case Management: Key Elements and Practices from the Field](#).

Administrative Burden				
Minnesota ⁵²	Empowerment of caseworkers to use “good cause” instead of sanctions	Dakota County’s (MN) Pathways to Prosperity pilot seeks to ease the heavy focus on compliance. One way that the pilot has sought to lessen the burden to families is by empowering caseworkers to veto sanctions if a member can prove that they had a valid reason for incurring that sanction. For example, if a participant is sanctioned for missing a work training event, the sanction can be waived if the reason for missing the required event is that the member did not have anyone to look after their child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved program experience for participants Higher overall cash assistance for benefits (less reductions from sanctions) More flexibility for caseworkers to make decisions based on the context of each participant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires communication / training for caseworkers on new processes / expectations Needs to be implemented in the context of a participant-focused culture, otherwise providers won’t make use of the sanction waiver
Massachusetts ⁵³	Empowerment of caseworkers to use “good cause” instead of sanctions	To minimize the number of sanctions that penalize a participant, Massachusetts’ Department of Transitional Assistance empowers their caseworkers to undo sanctions if the participant had good cause for missing the activity. Additionally, they have also limited the number of activities that might kick off the sanctions process, which has freed up caseworkers to make decisions on what activities are allowable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved program experience for participants Higher overall cash assistance for benefits (less reductions from sanctions) More flexibility for caseworkers to make decisions based on the context of each participant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires communication / training for caseworkers on new processes / expectations Needs to be implemented in the context of a participant-focused culture, otherwise providers won’t make use of the sanction waiver
Kentucky ^{54, 55}	Facilitated enrollment in community & technical colleges	Kentucky’s Ready to Work program provides comprehensive services to help TANF parents enroll and succeed in the state’s community and technical colleges – including outreach and recruitment, education and career planning / coaching, tutoring, case management, and retention strategies. A key component of the program is the development and support of work-study opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved educational opportunities for participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limits of existing partnerships between W-2 and WI community / technical colleges
Community Building				
California ⁵⁶	Coordinated approach between TANF and child welfare	Linkages is a collaboration between CalWORKs and Child Welfare that creates a continuum of services and supports to promote child and family well-being, preventing parents or caretakers from navigating between two different systems, which often have conflicting requirements and timeframes. Linkages works to improve the services coordination and case planning, prevents duplication of efforts, and maximizes funding and resources to better serve clients accessing both systems. The program facilitates accurate and systematic identification of families to receive Linkages coordinated services. To do this, the program seeks to know which families are concurrently involved in both CWS and CalWORKs by analyzing the service population and target families who can most readily benefit from the shared resources, and responding to changes in family circumstances that may create an opportunity for service coordination (e.g., job loss prompts application to CalWORKs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration across services and benefits delivered to participants (e.g., programs working together) Increased ability to use combined resources to more effectively mitigate barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High effort to implement (e.g., net-new cross-agency processes) Potential for extra work for case managers (e.g., coordination with another agency) Requires increased technology investments
Alabama ⁵⁷	Collaboration between housing initiative and TANF / SNAP services	Alabama’s Campus of Hope, run through the department of Housing and Urban Development, with the support of human services, provides wraparound services and coordinated case management onsite to public housing residents. The center cross-refers families living in the center to TANF / SNAP, ensuring that these families can access all services in one location. The center also provides employment and training services on-site, so individuals and families have the opportunity to access resources designed to put them on a path of financial and social awareness, and self-sufficiency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration across services and benefits delivered to participants (e.g., programs working together) Increased ability to use combined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High effort to implement (e.g., set-up new organization) May be difficult to receive funding for operations Very specific to location of campus

⁵² Dakota County staff members in interview

⁵³ MA DTA staff members in interview

⁵⁴ Kentucky Community and Technical College System. [About.](#)

⁵⁵ Administration for Children and Families (2016). [Supporting Postsecondary Completion for TANF Recipients through Work-Study Programs.](#)

⁵⁶ Child and Family Policy Institute of California. [What is Linkages?](#)

⁵⁷ Housing Authority Birmingham District. [Creating the Campus of Hope for Birmingham, Alabama.](#)

			resources to more effectively mitigate barriers	
Oklahoma ⁵⁸	Community organization provides wrap-around services and connections to services	Oklahoma's Community HOPE Centers were created in 2020 to serve the needs of the state's most vulnerable children, focusing on families with children aged 5-18. Each of Oklahoma's Community of HOPE centers has a behavioral health specialist and an Oklahoma Human Services staff member who work with caseworkers to develop wraparound services and referrals to workforce programs, safety net programs, and others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collaboration across services and benefits delivered to participants (e.g., programs working together) ▪ Increased ability to use combined resources to more effectively mitigate barriers ▪ Specialized behavioral health support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High effort to implement (e.g., set-up new organization) ▪ May be difficult to receive funding for operations ▪ Very specific to location of service
Wisconsin ⁵⁹	Integration of childcare in workforce participation programs	Northwest Wisconsin's Workforce Investment Board serves 10 counties of northwest Wisconsin to implement statewide workforce strategies to build a stronger workforce, in addition to providing supportive services to job applicants. Among the supportive services the board offers to job seekers are childcare, transportation, housing, equipment and technology assistance. The Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board (NWWIB) is a non-profit workforce resource serving 10 counties of northwest Wisconsin, including Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Price, Iron, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor, and Washburn. Supportive services offered through the program include childcare assistance, transportation assistance, housing assistance, equipment assistance, and technology assistance. Mari Kay Nabozny (the organization's CEO) set up childcare services and then partnered up with a local community college to integrate childcare as part of work participation program. She also worked with local community leaders for support - for example, a key building was donated to the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organizational structure and relationships are already established in certain areas of WI ▪ Provision of services that span multiple family needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relationships and workforce ecosystem may differ across different regions of WI (e.g., MKE vs. Balance of State) ▪ May require new funding to implement at scale statewide
Louisiana ⁶⁰	Connection between child support and employment / training programs	Through Department of Children and Family Support, the state of Louisiana established a new workforce section, the Child Support Enforcement and Training Program (CSE E&T) in 2021, to run alongside SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) and Strategies to Empower People Program (STEP), Louisiana's TANF work program. The vision for the program is for parents to connect seamlessly with employment and training resources across these three programs, and with the support of the other agency partners like community colleges and workforce commissions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whole family, 2Gen approach ▪ Alignment of benefits and services across programs, specifically including child support ▪ Proactive way of engaging noncustodial parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires effective buy-in and coordination with different partners
Case Management / Culture				
Michigan ^{61,62}	3-week intake period for assessment and connections to resources	Michigan's Partnership, Accountability, Training, Hope (PATH) program features a 21-day assessment period during which barriers to employment are identified and caseworkers work individually with participants to connect them with resources to address these barriers. The program includes a 10-day period focused on barrier remediation prior to formally enrolling participants in the program. The program includes an optional 50-question, web-based, participant self-assessment designed to identify the participant's strengths and barriers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to increase retention of participants in program (barrier mitigation) • Better understanding of participant needs; can improve longer-term involvement in program as well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires adjustment of current intake processes / timelines • Requires participant-oriented culture at service providers
Ohio ⁶³	Case management	The state's Comprehensive Case Management and Employment program (CCMEP) provides a common framework for delivering case management, employment, and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person-centered case 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be a change in current

⁵⁸ Oklahoma Human Services (2020). [Building a Hope Centered Organization: A Blueprint for HOPE](#).

⁵⁹ [Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board](#).

⁶⁰ [Louisiana Set for Success](#).

⁶¹ Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity. [Partnership, Accountability, Training, and Hope Program](#).

⁶² Michigan's PATH Program Guidelines. [Chapter 6: Application Eligibility Period](#).

⁶³ Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services. [TANF State Plan for Public Comment](#).

	framework for low-income, 14-24-year-olds	supportive services to low-income 14-to 24-year-olds. It leverages resources from TANF and WIOA Youth programs to provide early interventions to break the cycle of poverty and seeks to address factors contributing to poverty and unemployment, including housing, education, transportation, and childcare proactively at the program's outset. As part of this coordinated approach, participants must undergo a comprehensive assessment and sign an individual opportunity plan (equivalent to a self-sufficiency contract) prior to the authorization of benefits. The target population is low-income families below 200% of the federal poverty level.	management approach across program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific benefits and support for youth • Engages participants in service planning 	processes or ways of working <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires participant-oriented culture at service providers
Participant Empowerment				
Tennessee ^{64,65}	Informational videos (and social media) that communicate program details to participants	The Department develops informational videos - many featuring current or former participants - to share program expectations, details, and perspectives with other participants. The Department also utilizes social media to share timely program information and updates with participants. The Tennessee Department of Human Services has two YouTube channels (the old one and newer version) where participants explain various aspects of services offered and what they found most useful. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCY3eTlft5Fm8ed7M1ZQMDw/videos ▪ https://www.youtube.com/@TNHUMAN SERVICES/about Similarly, they have an active Facebook page (multiple posts a day) with 48,000 followers and regularly post fun facts and information about benefits that participants might not be aware of.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meets participants where they are and provides relevant information from current / past participants ▪ Low cost (and relatively low time) to implement ▪ Can quickly communicate program updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social media approach may require additional staff, particularly at the agency level (incl. social media manager) ▪ Can be a challenging medium to do well
Colorado ⁶⁶	Survey for former participants to assess program effectiveness	The Colorado Workers Leavers Survey helps the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) assess the effectiveness of the Colorado Works program in order to improve services. Participants are asked questions about their interactions with the program, and results are tracked and published every three months, in addition to being included in various publications and reports. The survey is sent to a sample of Colorado Works participants (approximately 800) who have recently left the program. Participants are asked questions about their experience in the program, beliefs about the goals of the program, how participation in the program contributed to their family goals, reasons for leaving the program, and current employment status and wage rate. Results and key takeaways from the survey are published every three months in a quarterly report, in addition to providing information for other reports such as state annual reports, impact of employment services and follow ups in job industries of participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low technology requirements ▪ Gain a high quantity of participant input ▪ Allows participants to provide feedback on their own time (i.e., asynchronous) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some participants may be less likely to provide feedback after leaving the program ▪ Some potential of response bias
Indiana ⁶⁷	Intake questions to assess how social determinants of health are impacting communities	The Indiana Hoosier Health and Well-being survey are 10 optional questions added to the TANF application to help program administrators assess how social determinants of health, such as where we live, learn and work, are impacting communities. A participant may complete the assessment every time they apply for TANF and results of all questions asked are published on the website on an interactive map that displays answers throughout different periods. The data allows county level administrators to assess well-being over time. To ensure personally identifiable information is protected, all data is presented in aggregated form with some fields not displayed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve understanding of how social determinants of health are impacting communities (macro level) ▪ Low technology requirements ▪ Gain a high quantity of participant input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Slight increase in length of intake process for participants who opt-in to these questions ▪ Some potential of response bias
Minnesota ⁶⁸	Index measure to assess program effectiveness	Minnesota's Self-Support Index (SSI) measures the original goals of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), the state TANF program, to help participants find and maintain employment, increase earnings and decrease cash assistance. The SSI is designed to show that it can take families some time to overcome their challenges. As such, the index spans three years and participants need to complete the survey at least one month in a quarter to be counted. It is an outcome measure that quantifies the original goals of the Minnesota Family Investment Program, which is to help participants find and maintain employment, increase earnings and decrease use of cash assistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved understanding of long-term participant outcomes (and impact of the program) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased data collection / tracking and analysis needs – likely requires somewhat significant time and money for effective implementation ▪ Some reports site that it does not provide meaningful data

⁶⁴ Tennessee Department of Human Services. [YouTube channel](#).

⁶⁵ Tennessee Department of Human Services. [Facebook channel](#).

⁶⁶ Colorado Department of Human Services. [Colorado Works \(TANF\) Leavers Survey](#).

⁶⁷ Indiana Office of the Chief Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity Officer. [Equity Portal – Social Services](#).

⁶⁸ University of Minnesota Future Services Institute. [Self-Support Index](#).

				about the participant experience or why participants continue with or drop out of the program
Supportive Systems				
Minnesota ⁶⁹	Statewide resource to help citizens navigate state public benefits	Minnesota has a “disability hub,” a free statewide resource network that explains the process of applying for public benefits to participants and helps them navigate the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ May increase likelihood of a participant’s enrollment in supportive programs (e.g., easier to know what is available) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires time and resources to develop and maintain
Program Benefits				
North Carolina ⁷⁰	Employment retention bonus for participants	Catawba County (NC) provides a one-time lump sum Employment Retention Bonus of \$400 to Work First participants whose Work First check terminates due to earned income and who remain employed a) with the same employer (unless the change is an improvement), b) employed full time (30+ hours per week) for four consecutive months following termination of their Work First Cash benefit, and c) income eligible based on the 200% level of poverty worksheet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides extra stabilization resources for participants ▪ Transitional support for participants and / or reduced impact of the “Cliff Effect” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unclear if allowable under current program rules
Massachusetts ⁷¹	Transitional support for participants who gain employment	<p>MA’s Department of Transitional Assistance provides transitional support services in the form of stipends to families with dependent children, whose cases have been closed. The services are intended to support the retention of employment and prevent the need to return to TANF. Services provided include Work Related Expense Stipends and Transportation Stipends for a period of four months post case closure, in addition to continuous childcare assistance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work Related Expense Stipend <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Month 1 \$200 ○ Month 2 \$150 ○ Month 3 \$100 ○ Month 4 \$50 ▪ Transportation Stipend <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Month 1 \$80 ○ Month 2 \$60 ○ Month 3 \$40 ○ Month 4 \$20 <p>Additionally, when a participant’s case is closed, they remain eligible for a childcare voucher until it expires. Once the voucher expires, the participant is notified to schedule an appointment to renew the voucher. The participant continues to be eligible for the childcare voucher if they meet the income requirement and activity requirement such as work, training or school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transitional support for participants and / or reduced impact of the “Cliff Effect” ▪ Ensures continued access to non-cash program benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ May require new funding source ▪ May conflict with state welfare rules
Pennsylvania ⁷²	Need-based grants for TANF participants	Individuals participating in PA’s TANF activities are eligible to receive special allowances (SPALS) - targeted, needs-based grants to cover the cost of items needed to successfully participate in employment and training activities (e.g., motor vehicle repair, gas money, clothing for work, tools / equipment, books / supplies). While W-2 service providers are providing resources like this to some extent, the PA program is more formal and consistent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential to increase long-term positive outcomes for participants ▪ Supports help enable participation in activities (e.g., materials for training) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ May require new funding source or changes to existing W-2 agency funding strategies

⁶⁹ Disability Hub Minnesota. [The Basics](#).

⁷⁰ North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. [2022-2025 State TANF Plan](#).

⁷¹ MA DTA staff members in interview

⁷² Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. [Employment and Training Supportive Services for TANF and SNAP Recipients](#).

Research on Outcome Metrics for Workforce Programs:

Category	Metrics
Employment	<p><u>Job Attainment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unsubsidized employment during 2nd quarter after exit (WIOA and SNAP E&T)^{73,74} ▪ Total number of job placements (MD)⁷⁵ ▪ Paid internship / apprentice placements - total # of participants placed into paid internship / apprenticeship positions (MD)⁷⁶ ▪ Employment exit rate - % of participants who leave for employment (MN)³⁶ ▪ 30-day employment placement rate (NYC)⁷⁷ ▪ Qualified reported placements - reflects cases that were closed due to earnings and cases that had their benefit re-budgeted due to increased earnings (NYC)⁷⁸ ▪ Positive enrollment closures - recipients who transition off assistance for employment-related reasons (UT)⁷⁹ <p><u>Job Retention</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unsubsidized employment during 4th quarter after exit (WIOA and SNAP E&T)^{80,81} ▪ % of individuals who obtained employment in one calendar quarter and remain employed in the following quarter (MD)⁸² ▪ 90- and 180-day retention rate (NYC)⁸³
Education / Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Completion rate - number and share of participants that completed a training, educational, work experience, or on-the-job training component (SNAP E&T)⁸⁴ ▪ Credential attainment rate - share of participants enrolled in education, training, or on-the-job training who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent during program participation or within one year after exit (WIOA)⁸⁵ ▪ Measurable skill gain - share of participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized credential and who are achieving measurable skill gains, defined as documented academic, technical, occupational, or other forms of progress toward that credential or employment (WIOA)⁸⁶
Earnings / Wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Median earnings in the 2nd quarter after exit (WIOA and SNAP E&T)^{87,88} ▪ Earnings gain rate - % of increased earnings over time for employed individuals (MD)⁸⁹ ▪ Full-time \$10/hour job placements - total # of job placements with 30+ hours per week at \$10+ hourly wage (MD)⁹⁰ ▪ Placement wages:⁹¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wages at time of placement (MN) ▪ Mean and median wages of recipients at placement (NYC) ▪ Increased earnings - customers with increased earnings from entering employment, job retention, or increased wages (UT)

⁷³ Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. [WIOA Primary Indicators of Performance](#)

⁷⁴ Urban Institute (2018). [Measuring Employment Outcomes in TANF](#)

⁷⁵ Urban Institute (2011). [Improving State TANF Performance Measures](#)

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. [WIOA Primary Indicators of Performance](#)

⁸¹ Urban Institute (2018). [Measuring Employment Outcomes in TANF](#)

⁸² Urban Institute (2011). [Improving State TANF Performance Measures](#)

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Urban Institute (2018). [Measuring Employment Outcomes in TANF](#)

⁸⁵ Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. [WIOA Primary Indicators of Performance](#)

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Urban Institute (2018). [Measuring Employment Outcomes in TANF](#)

⁸⁹ Urban Institute (2011). [Improving State TANF Performance Measures](#)

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

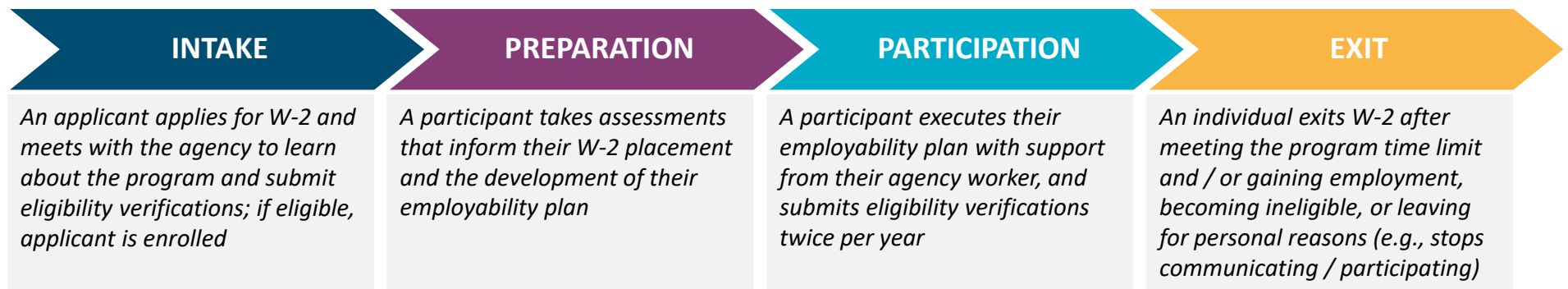
Appendix 5: Participant Experience Map

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SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE MAP DELIVERABLE

Our team used participant and non-participant stakeholder interviews, as well as program policy manuals, to illustrate the participant journey through Wisconsin Works with an emphasis on barriers to engagement and attrition areas

Stages of W-2 Participant Experience

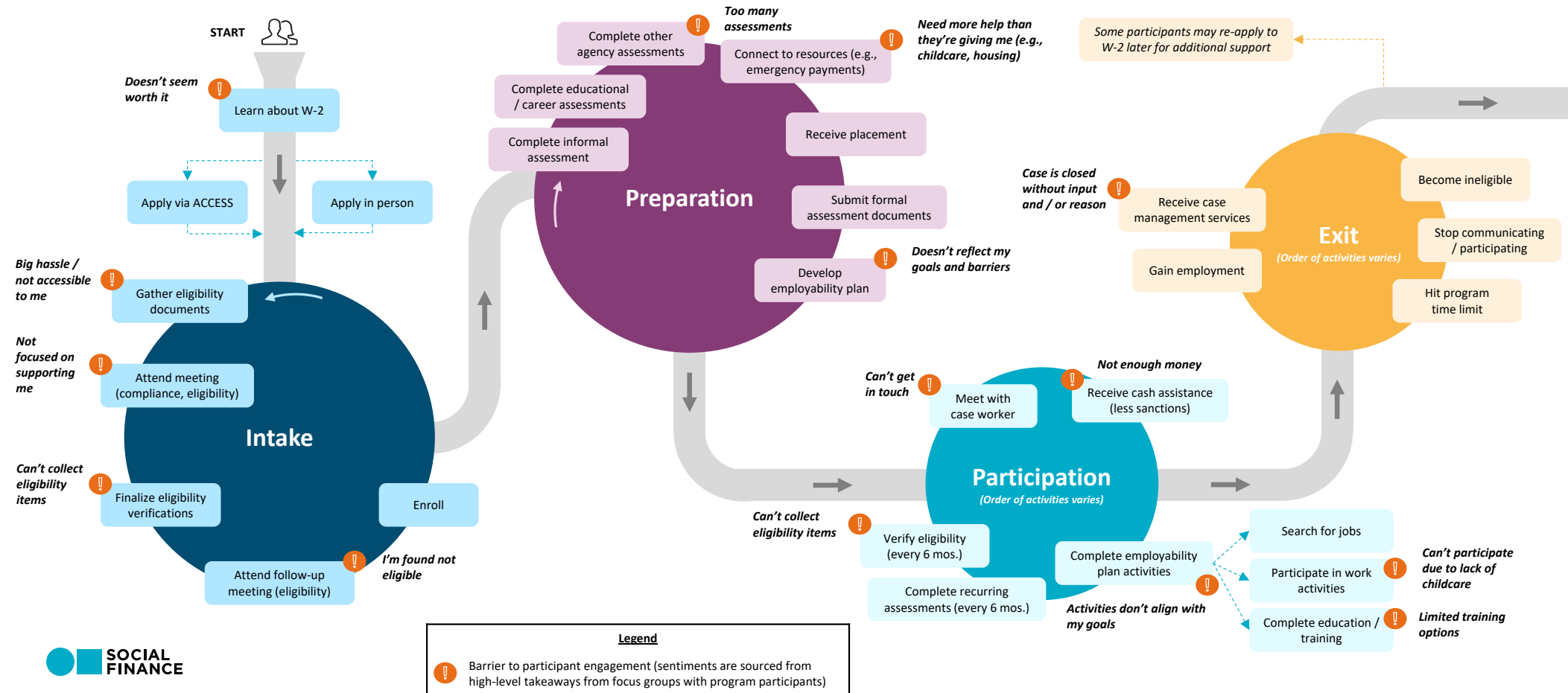


Overview of Materials

- This participant experience map is **intended to 1) help illustrate what the journey through Wisconsin Works looks like from the participant perspective and 2) identify “sticking points”** (e.g., pain points, common reasons for program attrition)
 - This was informed by numerous focus groups **with participants and interviews with non-participant stakeholders, as well as reviews of program policy manuals**
- Subsequent slides display the overarching journey at a high-level and then **discuss findings across themes** within each of the stages listed above

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE MAP: OVERVIEW

The participant journey through Wisconsin Works is complex and includes a wide variety of challenges that may inhibit an individual's ability to successfully navigate the system and receive supports sufficient for economic mobility



PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE MAP: INTAKE

After deciding to apply to Wisconsin Works, applicants collect verifications to demonstrate program eligibility and meet with their local agency to discuss the details of participation (e.g., program overview, requirements)



Theme	LEARN ABOUT W-2	APPLY	ATTEND INITIAL APPOINTMENT	CONFIRM ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLL
Description	How an individual originally learns about Wisconsin Works and their initial perceptions of the program	An individual's application to the program , either in-person (e.g., in a W-2 agency) or virtually via ACCESS (shared system with WI's Department of Health Services)	Typically, a potential applicant's initial interaction with the W-2 agency ; can be in-person (e.g., in a W-2 agency) or virtual and is focused on eligibility and program compliance	The process of collecting eligibility verifications and confirming eligibility for the program – may include multiple meetings with the W-2 agency
Quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “<i>[There’s] a lot they say they can help you with...but they have no idea how to.</i>” – Participant “<i>Before [my friend] told me about [W-2]...I didn’t even know that kind of help was out there.</i>” – Participant “<i>An individual doesn’t necessarily want to go to a W-2 agency...because they have a perception of what it is.</i>” – W-2 agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “<i>You do intake over the phone for food stamps, childcare...[but] cash assistance is completely different.</i>” – Participant “<i>It took me four months to finally ever get on [W-2].</i>” – Participant “<i>Clients think the whole intake process is a hassle and they just say, ‘forget it – I’m in a crisis and I need money now.’</i>” – DCF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “<i>They were explaining employment law...I didn’t fully process how they wanted me to do it...so my first week I got sanctioned. It was kind of discouraging.</i>” – Participant “<i>The participant agreement...[basically lists] all the things that you need to do exactly or else you’ll be dinged.</i>” – DCF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “<i>Y’all want me to keep providing proof...why is that? I provided enough proof.</i>” – Participant “<i>I don’t understand...I did [all of] this and you only gave me [a partial payment].</i>” – Participant “<i>We’re losing 30% of the clients that could be getting W-2...because of the [eligibility] verification process.</i>” – W-2 agency
Challenges / Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception that program isn’t a good option (e.g., a lot of time for minimal benefits); some still apply out of necessity (e.g., need resources for new baby) Negative brand (e.g., stigma with welfare) Lack of connection / referrals from other public programs (e.g., lack of awareness) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to gather information needed to complete the program application Agencies can offer very different experiences to participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial meetings and documents (e.g., participant agreement) are lengthy and focused on compliance rather than benefits or support Intake steps are often multi-step and inefficient – it’s too complex to require of someone in a crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to gather the high number of eligibility verifications – specifically school enrollment for children Some verification records require money to obtain Delayed initial payments (e.g., may take 1-2 months before receiving first paycheck)
Other Insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many participants expressed a hesitancy to apply for the program due to a perceived lack of benefits and support (e.g., not worth the effort) One of the most common sources of learning about W-2 was through friends / family who had experience being involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants have 12 days from application submission to become acquainted with the program and collect eligibility verifications – many have expressed this timeline to be rather quick, though they can re-schedule eligibility appointments up to 30 days after applying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agencies expressed that the initial appointment can often take 2+ hours, which can be a difficult for participants to commit to There is often scheduling difficulties between the agency and participant for the initial appointments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants may re-schedule an eligibility appointment (e.g., if they failed to gather verifications within the 12-day period) if they applied within the last 30 days

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE MAP: PREPARATION

Once enrolled, participants take multiple assessments to inform their program placement and development of their employability plan – depending on the context, some participants may receive additional resources for initial support

Theme	TAKE ASSESSMENTS	CONNECT TO RESOURCES	RECEIVE PLACEMENT	DEVELOP EMPLOYABILITY PLAN (EP)
Description	Multiple methods for a participant to share information with their W-2 worker – includes work / education history and future career interests, among others	The process by which a W-2 worker can connect a participant with other services or cash supports to prepare them to successfully engage in W-2	The designation of a W-2 placement for a participant, which determines the types of activities and requirements they have	The outline of activities and tasks for a participant to enable them to reach their career goals, largely informed by their assessments and placement
Quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “<i>[There was] a set of questions...but I feel like it didn’t go anywhere.</i>” – Participant “<i>Why’s it gotta be so long...that’s not [helpful].</i>” – Participant “<i>We burden participants with revealing very personal information...but then [it’s not reflected] in the employability plan.</i>” – DCF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “<i>If the housing situation is messed up...nothing else is right.</i>” – Participant “<i>They can offer other resources, but they don’t.</i>” – Participant “<i>Emergency payments [can] help clients...[but] agencies don’t advertise it.</i>” – Advocacy group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “<i>When I was approved for the program...they had me starting work activities the very next day.</i>” – Participant “<i>As soon as I get approved for the program and they schedule me to...do assessments...I should be approved for childcare right then and there.</i>” – Participant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “<i>A lot of [workers] have no idea what the [participants] are facing.</i>” – Participant “<i>[Workers] should be mindful that we have other responsibilities [besides] their requirements.</i>” – Participant “<i>EPs should be [individualized]...developed with participants.</i>” – Advocacy group
Challenges / Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too many assessments required early in the process – participants are inundated with information requests, not support Participants may need time to stabilize before engaging with assessments Assessments can be complex with lots of required information, which may be personal and / or not pertinent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants are not connected to (or made aware of) resources to stabilize their lives (e.g., housing) that enable them to engage Agencies can place more restrictions (not in policy) on accessing supportive benefits Supports can have high barriers (e.g., eviction notice is required for emergency assistance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A different placement may better reflect a participant’s needs The W-2 Transition placement requires documents to be sent by a medical provider – challenges to completing this can arise (e.g., arranging childcare) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information in the EP is not personalized or reflective of information in assessments The EP requires detailed, time-based career goals – especially at intake, this may not support participants The EP may not reflect a participant’s actual career goals
Other Insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Required assessments for new participants include an informal assessment (e.g., work history), career assessment, and educational needs assessment – some agencies have additional assessments as well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some resource connections from workers may not result in genuine, ongoing services (e.g., just a list of phone numbers to call) Emergency payments can significantly improve a client’s situation and their ability to participate in W-2 – current utilization is very low as agencies have been averse to distributing these funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some interviewees felt that the W-2 Transition placement could be more often utilized – agencies can be hesitant to place participants here as the placement’s activities may be less likely to count towards WPR¹ or yield a performance outcome payment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPs are intended to enable career goals but are also aligned with meeting WPR¹; the use of EPs as both a development and compliance tool may unintentionally tend towards a process, not participant, focus. Performance outcome payments incentivize agencies to quickly find people jobs, but not necessarily reach their career goals

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE MAP: PARTICIPATION

Throughout their involvement in the program, participants engage in a variety of jobs, education, and other activities while receiving varying case management support from their local agency



Theme	PURSUE WORK-RELATED ACTIVITIES	ADVANCE EDUCATION AND SKILLS	CONNECT WITH CASE WORKER	RECEIVE SUPPORTIVE SERVICES
Description	Work-related activities included in a participant's employability plan – these activities can be paid or unpaid, depending on the context	Education- or training-related activities included in a participant's employability plan that create a pathway to future employment aligned with career goals	Ongoing meetings between a participant and their W-2 worker – these are scheduled on a recurring basis (e.g., monthly) and can be ad-hoc for additional support as well	The connection of participants with other services or programs to support their W-2 journey and other needs, largely driven by W-2 workers
Quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Y’all ask so much of me to give me nothing [in return].” – Participant “I’m just going to sit here and do these employment searches...and another day is going to pass [me] by.” – Participant “Referring somebody to a job [with] all kinds of barriers to actually getting that job is just a waste of time.” – Participant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “When they have us go back, or people choose to go back, [to school]...they still want us to look for jobs.” – Participant “You can’t [always] arrange childcare to fulfill...activities on the employment plan.” – Participant “[They] didn’t really share [which activities count]...I don’t really know.” – Participant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “If [support] was good, what would it look like? Just responding to me.” – Participant “As far as...being guides for us, I don’t feel that connection.” – Participant “There is so much minutiae [and] no actual time for the human being.” – W-2 agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I feel like I exhaust all [available] programs every month.” – Participant “[Agencies] give you a list of childcare providers...but most of them are full.” – Participant “I think it’s very important for [the program] to understand...that men (single fathers) need help too.” – Participant
Challenges / Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assigned jobs don’t have positive, sustainable benefits (e.g., career ladder) Short term employment doesn’t allow participants to build experience, but it leads to agency performance outcome payments Financial assistance provided by W-2 is too low to make participation worthwhile Difficult to find childcare, housing, and transportation to support job activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education is often not prioritized as it is not a “core activity” There are limited training programs that are approved for W-2 participants Program limitations on time spent in education / training activities mean that participants who don’t already have certain skills / certifications may be restricted when pursuing gainful employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to get in touch with case worker on a timely basis (e.g., doesn’t respond)¹ Case worker doesn’t personalize interactions with participants and / or make updates to plans over time Large variance in case worker experience, exacerbated by high case worker turnover 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of connections to other supportive services (such as mental health care and intimate partner violence) from case worker Case workers can vary in how much effort they put into referrals (e.g., no warm hand-offs) Limited connections to organizations that provide comprehensive support (e.g., community action agencies)
Other Insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sanctions are often left to the discretion of the agency, which can vary in approach What “counts” as the activity often doesn’t include necessary components such as childcare and travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal policy and state statute prioritize job work over education that could lead to better employment Only a few technical colleges are approved for W-2; requirement for full-time education dissuades part-time programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caseload per agency case worker varies across agencies, but both DCF and agency interviewees alike expressed difficulty in providing services to participants due to the heavy demands of a high case load (e.g., 60-80+ per worker) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants often felt that they didn’t have an understanding of what supports were available to them through the program

1. Unresponsive case workers was a frequent challenge raised by participants during focus groups across agencies

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE MAP: EXIT

Participants most likely leave W-2 either after meeting the program time limit and /or gaining employment, becoming ineligible, or for other personal reasons – sometimes, participants re-engage in the future for additional support

Theme	EXIT THE PROGRAM	CONTINUE TO RECEIVE SERVICES	RE-ENGAGE WITH W-2
Description	A participant’s temporary or permanent exit from the W-2 program – this is largely due to meeting the program time limit and / or gaining employment, becoming ineligible (e.g., inability to verify eligibility), or leaving for personal reasons (e.g., stops communicating / participating)	Additional case management services that a W-2 agency may provide a participant after they gain employment – this is dependent on the context and does not always occur	A former W-2 participant’s re-engagement with W-2 after formerly exiting the program, assuming they have not used their entire “eligibility clock”
Quotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “They create a barrier for us to be our best selves...a lot of us want to be our best selves.” – Participant “Participants [must] choose between education or a job and surviving...and often they have to default to survival.” – W-2 agency “You’re just doing things to survive...you haven’t built real skills...then your time is up and you’re not eligible anymore.” – Advocacy group “A significant flaw of W-2 is that it doesn’t have an explicit anti-poverty goal...it has a goal of getting you to work, getting you off the program.” – Advocacy group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Just be a support system because [our] support system is trash.” – Participant “They don’t really tell us about what supports they have available.” – Participant “[My worker] didn’t get me anywhere near my career goals...I did it all myself.” – Participant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I used [W-2] before...I had the same job for nearly five years...but I lost it.” – Participant “We need help bettering ourselves...nobody wants to live off W-2...you cannot live off W-2. This is my last resort.” – Participant Some people need a little bit more time [and support]...or else they’ll cycle back” – DCF
Challenges / Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services provided throughout W-2 don’t adequately prepare participants for jobs that enable upward career mobility Participants may choose to stop engaging with W-2 prior to employment or time limit because of a lack of perceived benefits and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case worker may close the case with minimal (or no) attempts to provide continued case management services Participant experience with management services provided may vary by agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of connection between previous and new program involvements (e.g., new case worker, new agency) Re-engagement with the program may be due to the inability of the program to provide long-term supports in the first place
Other Insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On average, participants are still financially eligible for W-2 after they leave the program – given this insight, interviewees questioned whether the program was truly leading participating families to self-sufficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No data is currently collected to help program administrators understand different ways that participants exit W-2 The extent to which agencies provide ongoing case management can be motivated by a desire to maintain a high WPR (e.g., if providing it helps the agency) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants often re-engage with W-2 after exiting the program for additional services after a life event (e.g., help finding a job after losing one, new child)

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