



ADOPTING FATHER-INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE PRINCIPLES ACROSS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDING STREAMS

The 1996 welfare reform law (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996) had a couple important provisions for [federal funding of fatherhood initiatives](#). It established the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which offered states flexibility to spend funds on father-supportive work, and appropriated \$10 million per year in child support funds for states to establish and operate access and visitation programs for noncustodial parents. TANF funds, state maintenance-of-effort funding, and child support funds are among the largest sources of federal funding for father-supportive work. But according to the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), just half of all states use TANF funds for fatherhood programs.

The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 included a \$3 billion “Welfare to Work” grant program to fund employment services for mothers leaving cash assistance. These grant dollars could also be used to fund employment services for fathers of those mothers’ children experiencing un- or underemployment. The “Welfare to Work” program ended in 2000, but its principles live on in how TANF funds are allocated today.

The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 provided up to \$50 million and \$100 million per year for competitive, program-specific Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage Promotion grants programs for public and private entities. The Claims Resolution Act of 2010 extended funding for these programs through 2011 but adjusted for an even split of the \$150 million allocation. Since 2011, Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRP) grant programs have received a series of short-term extensions at that funding level.

A [2008 analysis](#) of Responsible Fatherhood initiatives by the Urban Institute found the lack of long-term sustainability inhibits program development and field innovation. Many of the initiatives funded by special, temporary sources like HMRP programs could not continue when funding expired. Consequently, services developed and institutional supports established were lost.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Despite the “welfare to work” strategy being a central tenet of TANF, most states spend little on work support and related activities. In 2018, states spent just \$900 million (3 percent) and \$3.3 billion (11 percent) of federal and state TANF funds on work supports and related activities, respectively. Seventeen states spent less than 1

percent and seven spent more than 5 percent on work supports, while seven states spent less than 2 percent on work-related activities. Seven states spent less than 5 percent on work activities and supports combined.

When states do spend TANF funds on work supports, they do not typically target them in ways inclusive of fathers — especially those from BIPOC communities and with low incomes. Three states among those spending the largest shares of TANF funds on work activities allocated significant portions of it to state higher education.

- Hawaii spent 21 percent of TANF funds on work activities in 2018.
Of those funds, almost \$34 million (82 percent of the state's spending on work activities) went to the University of Hawaii.
- Louisiana spent 15 percent of TANF funds on work activities in 2018.
Nearly \$31 million (93 percent of the state's spending on work activities) funded two state college scholarship programs.
- Mississippi spent 21 percent of TANF funds on work activities in 2018.
Over half (\$18.3 million) paid for a state-funded scholarship program.

At the same time, states accumulated \$5.1 billion of unspent TANF funds — with only five states (Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Vermont) reporting no unspent funds.

States have enormous opportunities to more effectively [leverage TANF funds](#) to support fathers' roles in families by redirecting funds spent on work activities to support living-wage employment and reevaluating use of unspent funds.

In 1999, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) awarded eight states (California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, Washington, and Wisconsin) Section 1115 grants or waivers totaling \$2.5 million for implementation and evaluation of demonstration projects to improve employment and earning of under- and unemployed noncustodial parents.

Findings from these projects included:

- Significant increases in employment rates and earnings
- Significant increases in child support compliance rates
- 27 percent of fathers reported seeing children more upon completion

[Section 1115 of the Social Security Act](#) gives HHS the authority to fund demonstration projects for the child support program that allow states and tribes to administer employment programs for noncustodial parents. States are responsible for funding 34 percent of Section 1115 projects from sources other than incentive, TANF, or maintenance-of-effort funding. Tribes are responsible for 10 or 20 percent of funding from sources other than TANF or Native Employment Works funding.

While grants and waivers for initiatives that support fathers are important sources of funding, they are not sufficient.

As the COVID-19 emergency and response efforts stretch state budgets, there is an opportunity for Congress to update the child support program to directly fund employment services for noncustodial parents. We know that ensuring living wage employment for caregivers moves the child support program closer to achieving its goal of all children receiving timely and consistent financial support from parents as ordered. We also know that economic stability and economic assets are critical to enabling conditions for caregivers to support their own, their children's, and their families' health and well-being.

Multiple and varied funding sources are important for scope, scale, and sustainability of father-supportive work.

Foundation and corporate giving are accounting for a [growing share of overall giving](#) in the US. Private and corporate foundations combined make up about a quarter (23 percent) of private philanthropy. Total foundation giving increased roughly 44 percent — from \$57 billion to \$82 billion — from 2012 to 2017.

Foundations and private corporations have opportunities to deepen the impact of their investments by adopting father-inclusive and -supportive principles, providing father-focused grantmaking, and supporting systems change to help dismantle structural barriers to prosperity.

THE EXAMPLE

In 2014, OCSE proposed a revision to give the child support program authority to directly fund job services for noncustodial parents. Advocates cited ongoing underfunding of employment services and potential benefits to rates of compliance among obligors. The provision allowing the program to directly fund employment services was omitted from the final rule issued December 2016.

In 2012, OCSE launched the National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED) to increase child support order compliance among noncustodial parents willing but unable to pay the orders assigned to them. Eight states (California, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin) were awarded five-year grants of \$2.3 million to partner with community service providers for employment and parenting services.

Based on [final impact findings](#) from the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin, CSPED:

- Reduced the proportion of noncustodial parents with child support orders that exceeded 50 percent of their income
- Modestly increased noncustodial parents' formal employment and earnings
- Increased the amount of contact between participants and their nonresident children

[Good+Foundation](#)

Since 2001, Good+Foundation has worked to dismantle multigenerational poverty by pairing essential goods with innovative services for caregivers with low incomes to move whole families toward upward mobility. Good+ partners with roughly 75 anti-poverty programs nationwide to provide access to job training, GED, anger management, and healthy relationship programming to fathers and mothers with low incomes.

With a recognition that American culture, policy, and social service infrastructure treated fathers as nonessential actors in child development and well-being, Good+ expanded their portfolio to intentionally and explicitly include fathers in their family-supportive efforts in 2010. The foundation's giving reflects truths that supported fathers in building stronger, more resilient families and thriving communities. An external evaluation of Good+'s work with fathers found:

- 93 percent of fathers receiving donations reported improved relationships with their children
- 82 percent of fathers receiving donations reported improved relationships with their children's mothers and/or other relatives