



Getting Involved in Welfare Reform: Answers to Commonly Asked Questions.



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Recently, an Extension agent described their expected role in their community as being “an expert on everything.”

Welfare reform will increasingly be affecting Kentucky's communities. Because it represents a dramatic change from the past, meeting the challenge will require the talents and creativity of all community members. In this, Extension agents are uniquely positioned to help out, either as being a general information source, or through specific programming.

Given the common expectation that agents are 'experts on everything', the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Welfare Reform Implementation Task Force Decision-Making Group decided to develop this short article to provide some answers to commonly asked questions regarding welfare reform.

What is welfare reform?

In 1996, the Congress of the United States passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This law put into place what is called welfare reform. Broadly put, this legislation instituted two key types of changes; both those which are programmatic as well as changes in the environment in which the programs operate.

Effective on July 1, 1997, this new system includes extensive work requirements and a 60 month

lifetime limit for Federal cash assistance. Changes were also made to Social Security and the Food Stamp Program. Moreover, at the State level, agencies are now faced with meeting new Federal participation rates within the confines set forth in the original legislation.

Year	% of Families	Min. Work Hours
1997	25%	20
1998	30%	20
1999	40%	30
2000	45%	30
2001	50%	30

(Participation rates are higher for 2-Parent Families)

What does TANF and K-TAP stand for?

TANF is the acronym used to refer to the new Federal program, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, which replaces Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS).

TANF forms the basis for state programs designed to meet new Federal requirements within a system of Federal monitoring and penalties. As a result, each state has developed its own specific program with its own name. In Kentucky, this program is

called K-TAP or the Kentucky Temporary Assistance Program.

How is this reform different from others?

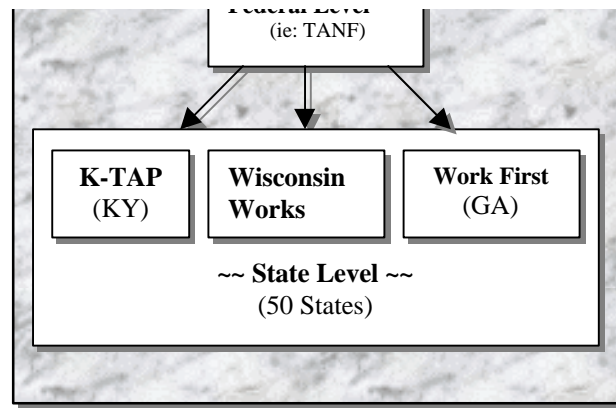
While there have been previous efforts at reforming welfare, this legislation represents a fundamental change for several reasons. First, this legislation ends the social safety net in place for over 50 years. It does so by placing a Federally-mandated lifetime limit for individuals to have access to cash assistance. Second, it includes a fundamental altering of emphasis from hardship alleviation to a system focused on employment. This is a real change for how programs are run as social service agencies now must emphasize providing job placements for recipients.

The welfare reform legislation also means a dramatic change for how welfare programs are designed. Previously, programs were designed for the nation as a whole. While states had some flexibility, overall the program was set at the national level.

Today, programs are designed on a state-by-state basis through Federal block grant funding. While parameters are set nationally, there is much greater room than before for flexibility. For example, states can have shorter time limits than the 60 months Federal limit. However, along with this flexibility comes a new threat for states. Penalties in the form of reductions in Federal funding are now in place should states fail to meet new Federal requirements such as work participation rates.

What happens when the time-limit runs out?

What happens when the 60 month lifetime limit of assistance runs out is a growing concern. For many communities across Kentucky, and the nation as a whole, high levels of participation in welfare tend to go hand in hand with a limited local job market. Consequently, some states are opting to provide financial assistance to help people move.



While many individuals are indeed moving from welfare to employment, some research nationally indicates that increasingly people still need help. Often these individuals and families turn to non-state agencies such as local churches, food pantries, and soup kitchens. In the end, it will fall to communities to not only devise creative approaches to helping recipients overcome barriers to employment (such as child care, transportation, etc.) but it will also fall to local communities to fill in the gaps when government assistance either falls short or runs out.

How is welfare reform being implemented in Kentucky?

Because we now have block grants from the Federal government, each state is adapting the Federal TANF program to their particular situations. In Kentucky, this program is called K-TAP or the Kentucky Temporary Assistance Program.

Headed up by the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children, this program must work within the Federal TANF guidelines and the Federal legislation to establish a new welfare system in the state. In doing so, recipients in Kentucky now face the 60 month lifetime limit and must also meet new Federal work requirements. Should they fail to do so, penalties are assessed on their assistance. For example, if a recipient fails to work for a specified period of time, the dollar amount of their assistance will be decreased by a corresponding percentage.

To help meet the challenges of welfare reform, each county in Kentucky has also been asked to develop a local county plan. These plans are intended to lay out how those in each county can

work together to meet the new welfare reform requirements. New programs at the state level are also being developed such as welfare-to-work.

Change in the Number of Welfare Recipients (1996-7)			
	Aug. 1996	July 1997	Percent Change
Kentucky	170,890	151,190	-12%
Nationwide	12.202	10.211	-16%

What is Welfare-to-Work?

Welfare-to-Work is a grant program established by the 1997 new Balanced Budget Act of Congress. This program is run by the U.S. Department of Labor and is intended to assist the “hardest-to-employ” TANF recipients through job placement services, transitional employment, and other support services.

This program has two components: Formula Grants to States based on a submitted state plan, and Competitive Grants to local communities. The upcoming round of competitive grants will be distributed with 30% going to rural areas and 70% going to urban areas with funding for three years. So far, the program has been funded by Congress only through the 1999 fiscal year.

What is the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Welfare Reform Implementation Task Force?

The Kentucky Cooperative Extension Welfare Reform Implementation Task Force is a direct outcome of the original task force set up to determine the role of the Cooperative Extension Service in welfare reform in Kentucky. This group is working to identify and develop materials to help Extension agents be a responsive resource to welfare reform.

Organized to implement the recommendations of the original task force, this group has five subgroups; Nutrition/Food Economics, Work-force Preparation, Child Care Providers, Life Skills, and

Community Resources. The Life Skills group is further subdivided into five groups; Consumer Awareness, Communication, Decision Making, Family Life, and Wellness.

Each group is working to compile and develop materials which will be available for county agents to either work with themselves, or as a resource agents can share with others working with welfare reform, K-TAP recipients, and others with limited resources. Many of these materials will also be available on the web.

<http://www.uky.edu/Agriculture/HomeEcExt/welfare>.

How do I find out more about welfare reform?

Whether you are looking for more information for yourself or responding to a question posed by a client, there are several easy places you can go for more information. Information on K-TAP is available from the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children on their website at <http://cfc-chs.chr.state.ky.us/reform>.

For a detailed discussion of the welfare reform legislation, its impacts on Kentucky, and myths surrounding those facing poverty, you can read the SEED Publication “Welfare Reform and its Implications for Kentucky’s Families on the Economic Edge” by Lori Garkovich, Gary Hansen and Trisha Dyk. This article was distributed in 1997 through Rural Sociology in the UK College of Agriculture and has also been reprinted in Volume 4, No. 2 of *Foresight* from the Kentucky Long Term Policy Research Center.

More information is also available from the *Research Center for Families and Children Newsletter*, Volume 6, No. 1, as well as Volume 1, No. 2 of *Community Developer*, the newsletter of the Kentucky Community Development Society.

Since welfare reform is both far reaching and currently underway, the World Wide Web is an excellent resource to find more information. There are web sites that can give you updates as well as other web sites that have information addressing a

specific issue such as child care options. For example, the Welfare Information Network at <http://www.welfareinfo.org> is an excellent source.

A detailed listing of some of these websites is available in the SEED Publication “Welfare Reform on the Internet” compiled by Julie N. Zimmerman. This listing was distributed in 1997 and is also available on the web site for the KY Cooperative Extension Welfare Reform Implementation Task Force mentioned above.

Since there is an enormous amount of details on the changes embodied in the new Kentucky Temporary Assistance Program, an always important source of more information is your local Department of Social Insurance. A list can be found on the website for the Cabinet for Families and Children.

How can I become involved?

The changes represented by the new welfare reform mean that State agencies, local offices, and local communities are facing great challenges. Sometimes challenges such as this also present opportunities for collaboration. For example, local agencies could help facilitate with Extension life skills training for recipients.

In meeting the challenge of welfare reform, Cooperative Extension and county Extension agents are a unique resource to local communities. Local agents have access to resources useful to the community as a whole such as local data and information. For example, the SEED series “Welfare Reform: By the Numbers” provides local data on a wide array of issues such as housing, education, and the local economy. These data could be useful in the county planning for welfare reform or local decision-making on any number of issues.

Should they choose to do so, local agents could also provide educational opportunities. These could be for professionals working with recipients or programming for recipients themselves. This can often be done by adjusting and adapting programs that an agent has already provided. Additional resources are also available through the Cooperative Extension Welfare Reform Task Force sub-groups, state subject matter specialists and university resources.

As each county in Kentucky has been working on developing local plans surrounding welfare reform, contact your local Department of Social Insurance office to find the welfare reform committee in your county.

Summing it up

In July of 1997 the clock started ticking. Individuals receiving public assistance now have to meet a new set of requirements or face reductions or loss of assistance altogether. After 60 months, welfare could be closed-off as a option as individuals, families, and children reach the Congressionally-legislated lifetime limit of Federal cash assistance.

With the focus on programmatic changes such as these, welfare reform discussions have seemed far removed for many people. And yet, welfare reform affects us all. And all of us are needed to make welfare reform succeed. Across Kentucky many Cooperative Extension county agents are involved in their community’s welfare reform effort and in a variety of capacities. This article looks at how and why we should all be involved.

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SEED (Social and Economic Education for Development) is a program of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service at the University of Kentucky. Faculty draw on the resources of the Social and Natural Resources Information Laboratory and professional contacts at the the University of Kentucky, other agencies, and community programs throughout the country. For more information contact your local Cooperative Extension office or Dr. Richard C. Maurer, SEED, 500 Garrigus Building, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40546 or call (606) 257-7582.