Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)/Choices Standards and Guidelines

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1. Introduction

The TANF/Choices program is an employment and training program administered by Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to facilitate employment and job retention through strategies that encourage career preparation and family support, leading to self-sufficiency for:

- ***TANF applicants,***
- ***TANF recipients,***
- ***Non-recipient parents, and***
- ***Former recipients of TANF cash assistance.***

Individuals apply for TANF through HHSC and are referred to Workforce Solutions for assistance with employment.

These guidelines clarify who must participate with Workforce Solutions and who can choose to volunteer for specific benefits or services. They outline the procedures for participation, including documenting, verifying, and recording compliance, as well as the processes and timelines for penalizing those who don't cooperate.

It's essential for individuals to comply with federal and/or state laws to access certain public assistance benefits. The goal of requiring participation is to help public assistance recipients find employment, keep their jobs, increase their income, or secure better job opportunities.

Our services are available to all individuals and include job matching based on education and skills, professional advice on job search strategies, insights into local job markets, guidance on education and training, and assistance in securing financial support for job search activities, work, or education.

For individuals required to participate, there are specific requirements regarding the time spent on work readiness and work-related activities, instructions on effectively combining different activities, the need to demonstrate cooperation, and consequences for failing to meet requirements or prove compliance.

In cases of uncertainty, it is crucial for staff to document the action taken and the justification in a case note for record-keeping and accountability purposes.

2. Requirements for Participation

2.1. Who Must Participate?

Applicants and recipients of TANF are required to cooperate with Workforce Solutions unless HHSC has excused the individual from these requirements.

Individuals who must work with us include TANF recipients who are adults or teen heads-of-household mandatory work registrants, including *extended TANF recipient*, *conditional applicants*, and *sanctioned families.*

- *Extended TANF recipients* are adults who receive TANF cash assistance past the 60-month federal time limit because of a hardship exemption.
- *Conditional applicants* are adults or teen heads-of-household who left TANF in a sanctioned status but are reapplying for TANF cash assistance.
- *Sanctioned families* are adults or teen heads-of-household who must demonstrate cooperation for one month in the month following a penalty month to reinstate TANF cash assistance.

TANF Applicants must work with Workforce Solutions to receive financial aid but **<u>cannot</u>** have benefits sanctioned until HHSC certifies them to receive benefits.

Individuals who volunteer to work with us include TANF recipients or guardians of children receiving TANF who are excused by HHSC from required participation. When exempt TANF recipients volunteer to work with us, they must meet the requirements for cooperation.

2.2. How Do We Know Who Must Participate?

HHSC assigns work codes to individual TANF recipients. Workforce Solutions staff can check an individual's work code in the case management system on the HHSC Information Ribbon or HHSC's management information system, Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System (TIERS) to see if they are required to cooperate with Workforce Solutions.

The case management system has outreach pools for TANF recipients. If an individual with a mandatory HHSC work code falls into the TANF outreach pool, they are required to cooperate with Workforce Solutions.

2.3. Who Do We Outreach?

HHSC sends TANF applicants, conditional applicants, and sanctioned families to Workforce Solutions when they apply for TANF benefits. Workforce Solutions actively recruits all other individuals who are required to cooperate and individuals who can volunteer.

We send an outreach letter to mandatory TANF recipients who fall into the outreach pool via mail or email, if we have an email address on file. Additionally, ***staff must contact customers who fail to respond to the outreach letter via phone, which may include a text message notification or conduct a home visit, as a last resort.***

Notes: Outreach letters must be sent to the mailing address listed in the case management system. If the Scheduler in the case management system is not available to generate outreach letters, Workforce Solutions staff must manually outreach customers and add a case note indicating the date the letter was sent, the date and time of the scheduled appointment, the reason for outreach, and the consequences of non-attendance for mandatory individuals. <u>Voicemail is not an acceptable form of outreach.</u>

If a letter is returned, staff must document the return in case notes.

Outreach letters must provide detailed information about vocational education, training, subsidized employment, incentives, and support services available through the Choices program.

All outreach attempts must be documented in case notes and contain:

- Time, date, and location for the mandatory customer to report for activities,
- Name and contact number of a Workforce Solutions Office representative,
- Opportunity to provide a valid reason for non-attendance on or before the scheduled appointment date, and
- Consequences for noncooperation.

2.4. Workforce Orientations

Individuals required to cooperate with Workforce Solutions and those who volunteer to work with us must attend a workforce orientation, either in person or virtually, as part of their eligibility to receive TANF cash assistance and Workforce Solutions financial aid. The orientation provides an overview of the services and activities available through Workforce Solutions to help individuals find suitable employment.

The workforce orientation must include:

- ***Completion of the Wagner-Peyser application, Work Readiness Assessment, and TANF/Choices Program Application in WIT***

Note: When customers are outreached, a registration-only account is created for the individual. Staff must work with the customer to complete their registration.

- ***Guidance on job search techniques and local labor market information***
- ***Job counseling and personalized assistance***
- ***Job search support and daily job referrals***
- ***Help with applications and résumés, including access to resource room facilities (computers, phone, fax)***
- ***Interest, aptitude, and educational testing***
- ***Information on One-Time TANF (OTTANF)***
- ***Information on available support services upon securing employment***
- ***Determination of preferred communication methods and contact frequency with staff***
- ***Requirements for participation in allowable activities, with expectations for immediate and ongoing engagement***
- ***Information on incentives for achieving goals and objectives related to participation***
- ***Consequences of nonparticipation for mandatory participants and good cause when an individual is unable to participate***
- ***HHSC exemptions and benefits for exempt participants voluntarily engaging in Choices activities***
- ***Information on the right to appeal adverse decisions made by Workforce Solutions.***

Staff must assess each participant to determine appropriate activities for participation. If a participant is job-ready, staff must provide professional advice and resources for securing employment, including job search activities and referrals, and job readiness such as resume and interview assistance, if needed. If barriers like lack of a high school diploma are identified, staff must coordinate connections to Adult Basic Education (AEL) services.

Staff must also discuss the participant's long and short-term career goals to develop a collaborative Individual Employment Plan (IEP) that includes steps to overcome identified challenges, expected completion timelines, and action steps for employment. Staff can refer to Creating an Individual Employment Plan in WIT for detailed steps to document an IEP in WIT.

Conditional applicants have 40 days from the date of referral from HHSC to demonstrate cooperation by attending a workforce orientation and participating in allowable Choices activities for four consecutive weeks.

TANF applicants must be allowed to attend a workforce orientation, regardless of the applicant's application date. <u>If the TANF applicant has a pending TANF application and needs to attend an orientation to complete the application process, they must be allowed to attend the orientation.</u>

2.4.1. Alternative Orientation

If an individual is unable to attend an orientation in person or virtually due to extraordinary circumstances, Workforce Solutions staff must conduct an alternative orientation. Alternative orientation arrangements may include:

- An orientation scheduled at a local HHSC office;
- An orientation during non-business hours;
- An orientation at an individual's home;
- An orientation by telephone;
- A computer-based orientation; or
- An orientation via video.

Extraordinary circumstances may include any of the following:

- No available transportation;
- Residing more than 30 miles from the nearest Workforce Solutions office;
- Caring for a child under four months of age;
- Conflicting work or school schedule;
- Illness or injury of the applicant or spouse;
- Illness or injury of another household member that requires the applicant's care; or
- Being a victim of family violence in a situation such that attending the orientation would place the applicant or family in danger.

Workforce Solutions staff must document in a case note:

- The date of the alternative orientation,
- An explanation of the reason an alternative orientation was conducted, and
- Support services needed and/or provided to address barriers to employment or participation in Choices services.

2.4.2. Two-Parent Families

Mandatory adults in a two-parent family must sign a Choices Family Cooperation Agreement acknowledging they:

- Are responsible for meeting the work requirement; and
- May elect to have only one of the adults meet the work requirement.

The required hours of participation will be divided between one or both adults in accordance with the household's participation agreement for compliance with Choices program requirements (see section 3.2). ***The program application must be completed for both parents regardless of if one parent will participate.***

If the program requirements are not met, the family will be subject to a penalty.

2.5. Literacy Assessments

A literacy assessment is required for all Choices participants who are:

- At least 18 years of age; or
- Heads of household, as determined by HHSC who are not yet age 18, have not completed secondary school or a high school equivalency (HSE) credential and are not attending secondary school.

The following individuals are exempt from this requirement:

- Individuals who are employed full-time (at least 32 hours per week) but are not coded as receiving the Earned Income Deduction (EID);
- Individuals who have a language barrier; and
- Individuals who lack literacy and may not be able to complete the assessment.

Workforce Solutions staff must schedule the individual to complete the literacy assessment during the orientation and enter in case notes:

- The date the assessment was scheduled, or
- An explanation of why they are exempt from taking the literacy assessment.

Once the individual completes the assessment, Workforce Solutions staff must enter into the case management system:

- The date the literacy assessment was administered, and
- Their test scores.

Notes*:*

- *Scores do not expire so retesting is not required.*
- *After conducting an assessment with the individual, staff may refer them to retest for determining:*

- *Whether there is an improvement in basic skills after participation in an educational component; or*
- *Suitability for a training program that requires a demonstrated educational functioning level.*

Staff must document in case notes an explanation of the reason the customer retested.

2.6. Reconsiderations

Workforce Solutions staff may request that HHSC changes the work code for a mandatory TANF recipient most often because of a disabling condition for the recipient or a family member that prevents any participation by the recipient. In this case, Workforce Solutions staff must, ***within 24 hours of receiving the information***:

- Complete and fax Form H2583 to HHSC requesting reconsideration of the individual's work code;
- Send a copy of the individual's medical documentation, if they submit a doctor's letter or Form 1836 A/B, to HHSC and store a copy of the medical documentation confidentially in the customer's file in the document management system;
- Document in case notes:
  - A statement that Form H2583 was sent to HHSC;
  - The date Form H2583 was sent to HHSC;
  - The reason for the reconsideration; and
  - A statement that a copy of the form and fax confirmation are maintained in the document management system;

Staff must determine and document good cause until HHSC changes the work code to exempt or until the individual can work or participate in activities to prepare for work.

2.6.1. HHSC Regional Support Team

If HHSC does not change an individual's work code or take requested action, staff must contact HHSC's Regional Support Team to resolve the issue.

Before contacting the HHSC Regional Support Team, staff should follow these procedures:

- Continue submitting Form H2583 as appropriate.
- Initiate penalties through WIT Sanction Ribbon if necessary.
- Allow HHSC time to process actions (usually five business days).
- If HHSC does not act as requested, email oes_ccc_ic@hhsc.state.tx.us with the:

- Customer’s name
- HHSC case #
- Specific issue
- When circumstances require immediate action, include “Need by (Date)” or “Urgent” in the subject line of email.
- If there are multiple inquiries, email each issue separately.

Staff must document the communication with HHSC in case notes.

3. Participation Hours

3.1. What Are the Basic Activities?

Individuals who are required to participate—and those who volunteer—must participate in job search, job readiness, education and training, or work activities to help them prepare for employment.

Staff must assess each individual to determine the most suitable activity(ies) based on their circumstances and may combine activities to meet participation requirements. ***For example, to facilitate a quick return to work or entry into the workforce for an individual with limited work history, staff may offer a work-based learning opportunity for the customer to gain work skills and improve their employability following the workforce orientation.***

Individuals participating in TANF/Choices, may cooperate by engaging in an appropriate mix of activities leading toward employment.

TANF Activities Classified for Cooperation
Job Search and Job Readiness • Supervised job search – counseling, online job search, hiring events, job development, job placement, etc. • Self-directed job search – job fairs, interviews, applying for jobs, etc. • Job skills training • Substance abuse or mental health counseling
Education and Training • Basic education (literacy, ABE/GED or HSE preparation, ESL) • Occupational/vocational training • High school/Middle school • Entrepreneurial training
Work • Unsubsidized employment including self-employment • Subsidized employment • On-the-job (OJT) training • Work-based literacy
Volunteer Work • Community service • Work experience

3.1.1. Job Search and Job Readiness Activities

Job search and job readiness activities prepare participants for employment and enhance their employability through:

- Career counseling,

- Job development services,
- Job market information,
- Assistance with job applications, and
- Professional advice on work behaviors.

Participants must make weekly contact with a Workforce Solutions office based on their preferred method of contact and submit proof of their activities weekly in job search and/or job readiness. Staff must review the participant's job search logs and provide professional advice to improve job search efforts to obtain suitable employment.

We can count a partial week of at least three days of job search or job readiness as a full week of cooperation **once** in a 12-month period for participants in the TANF/Choices program. The participant **must** record some measure of time for three of the days in that week.

3.1.2. Education and Training

Education and training activities include attending high school, adult basic education/GED or HSE preparation, literacy, and English language instruction, some basic skills/nonvocational training, and vocational/occupational training. For participants involved in this activity, staff must:

- Develop an IEP that includes goals, objectives, and estimated timeframes for completion based on individual factors;
- Assess monthly if the individual is progressing satisfactorily as reported by the educational institution and documenting the progress in case notes;
- ***Record Measurable Skills Gains (MSG) as achieved (refer to Documenting Measurable Skill Gains)***;
- Store verification/supporting documents in the participant's file in the document management system;
- Provide counseling or coaching if the participant is not progressing satisfactorily and documenting:
  - A conversation with designated staff from the institution;
  - A copy of the participant's grades or evaluation; or
  - A letter or e-mail from designated staff at the institution.

Participants may be co-enrolled in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-funded education and training programs, which must relate to a high skill, high growth occupation listed on the statewide eligible training provider list (ETPL) by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). All WIOA activities must be tracked under TANF/Choices participation and WIOA funding.

Online learning options like courses through Metrix are encouraged to enhance work skills and count towards TANF/Choices participation hours; however, ***only Metrix courses in the following categories count toward Choices full engagement:***

- ***328 – Occupational/Vocational Training (Non-ITA) or***
- ***302 – Entrepreneurial Training.***

If a Choices participant is enrolled in an online learning course, staff must select the correct service code based on the education/training type. Use the course description and the Service Matrix to identify and enter the appropriate service in the case management system.

Staff must be aware of the following:

- ***Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses taken through online learning are not included in Choices performance.***
- ***Choices participants who need Adult Basic Education services must be referred to the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) program.***
- ***Service 214 - Literacy, Basic Skills/ABE, must be entered only when Adult Basic Education is provided by an AEL grant recipient or another approved provider. For a complete list of approved AEL and ESL providers in the state for which Choices hours may be counted toward participation and performance, use the Adult Education Provider Directory.***

For verification documentation, see Documentation Requirements for Cooperation.

Participants without a high school diploma or GED/HSE can enroll in adult basic education or literacy/English language classes based on staff assessment. Those with a high school diploma or equivalent are not eligible for these educational services.

Participants may also engage in job skills training, which is necessary for obtaining, advancing in, or adapting to employment.

Additionally, individuals can take literacy or English language classes related to employment, entrepreneurial training to start or grow a business, or receive support for an existing small business to enhance employability.

Occupational training, which prepares participants for specific trades, occupations, or vocations, is also available. This vocational education must lead to a credential below a baccalaureate or advanced degree to count toward requirements. ***Staff must request and file a copy of any credential earned, store it in the participant's file in the document management system, and update WIT: Common Intake and Performance Outcomes.***

3.1.3. Work Activities

In general, engaging in work activities is the easiest way to meet cooperation requirements for TANF/Choices participants. Work can include unsubsidized work, subsidized work, on-the-job training, and work experience.

When requiring and counting time in work activities, if the activity itself would otherwise be classified as non-exempt under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), the requirements and limits on time in the activity must take into account FLSA rules.

A. <u>Unsubsidized Work</u>

Unsubsidized work includes:

- Full-time or part-time employment (where wages are fully paid by the employer).
- Internships (where wages or stipends are fully paid by the employer).
- Self-employment (which can be an established business or a prospective one the individual is interested in starting).

Self-Employment Verification

Before tracking self-employment hours for TANF/Choices participants, we must verify and document the participant's self-employment enterprise. Acceptable documents include:

- Federal income tax forms or quarterly income reports, such as Form 1040, or Schedule C, F, or SE from the most recent tax year;
- Property titles, deeds, or rental agreements for the business location;
- Recent business-related bank, phone, utility, or insurance bills;
- Recent state sales tax returns;
- Business records showing income and expenditures, such as money orders, checks, client lists, or personal wage records with third-party verification; or

- Evidence of preparation for a new business, such as advertising, state tax registration, assumed name certificates, business plans, or bank account information.

***Note**: Receipts cannot be used for self-employment verification but can be used for tracking participation hours.*

During the orientation, staff must provide participants with the form "Initial Verification of a Self-Employment Enterprise – List of Acceptable Documents." Participants must submit one of these documents as proof of their self-employment.

Staff should document the initial verification in case notes and keep a copy of the verification document(s) in the participant's file.

Case Note Example – Subject: Self-Employment Initial Verification
Mary Jones is a self-employed house cleaner serving two clients who each pay $50 per week. She provided a recent check from one client and their contact information. Since she provides her own supplies, there are no business expenses. Copies of the check and client list are stored in her file.

Ongoing Documentation
To track ongoing participation in self-employment, we require documentation showing income and business expenses, such as:

- Invoices signed by clients with names, contact information, dates, locations of services, and amounts received.
- Receipts for payments.
- Copies of payment checks.
- Expense receipts.

The net self-employment income (gross income minus business expenses) is divided by the federal minimum wage to calculate hours worked/participation hours.

There are no limits on unsubsidized employment, but continuous unsubsidized work may lead to the loss of TANF cash assistance.

B. Subsidized Work
Subsidized work is full or part-time employment where the worker's wages are fully or partially funded by Workforce Solutions or another source, rather than the employer.

Staff must assist individuals in subsidized work with transitioning to unsubsidized positions. This involves collaborating with employers who may offer regular employment upon successful completion of the subsidized placement.

C. On-the-Job Training (OJT)
OJT is full-time employment with a private or public employer in which Workforce Solutions reimburses an employer a percentage of the worker's wages to cover costs of training. Staff must make sure that OJT:

- Provides knowledge or skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job;
- Is limited in duration, as appropriate, to the occupation for which the Choices participant is being trained, considering the content of the training, the individual's prior work experience, and the service strategy of the participant; and
- Includes training specified by the employer (i.e., customized training).

Workforce Solutions must be aware that OJT placements are allotted to employers that expect to retain Choices participants as regular, unsubsidized employees once the OJT placement has ended, unless successful completion of the placement is expected to result in unsubsidized employment with a different employer.

D. Work-based Literacy
A work-based literacy component such as ABE, ESL or Workforce Adult Literacy may only count toward Choices engagement when it is tied to an employment activity. Work-based literacy programs are provided through a partnership between Adult Education and employers in our region. Staff may refer participants who need literacy skills to an Adult Education Connector for further assistance.

Staff must:

- Develop an IEP that includes goals, objectives and estimated timeframes for completion based on individual factors;
- Assess monthly if the individual is progressing satisfactorily as reported by the employer and documenting the progress in case notes;
- ***Record Measurable Skills Gains (MSG) as achieved (refer to Documenting Measurable Skill Gains)***;
- Store verification/supporting documents in the participant's file in the document management system;

- Provide counseling or coaching if the participant is not progressing satisfactorily and documenting:
  - A conversation with designated staff from the employer;
  - A copy of the participant's grades or evaluation; or
  - A letter or e-mail from designated staff at the employer.

E. Volunteer Work

Volunteer work is unpaid work that is classified in different ways in the case management system, depending upon the type of work arrangement and an individual's program enrollment/co-enrollment (i.e., TANF, WIOA, Youth, etc.). Staff are responsible for:

- Developing volunteer work opportunities and making sure an adequate number of sites are available for their career office;
- Pre-arranging all volunteer work activities (participants may not arrange their own volunteer work);
- Designing volunteer work opportunities to be short-term and help participants move into regular employment quickly; and
- Storing all signed Non-Financial Agreements for each volunteer work site in the document management system.

It is important to note that all volunteer work is limited by FLSA requirements. Staff must keep current FLSA calculations to determine allowable hours in volunteer work for each month during which a participant is engaged in volunteer work. **Staff cannot stack two FLSA-covered activities.**

FLSA Limitations

Following are our procedures for calculating FLSA limitations:

- Calculate the FLSA maximum hours allowed the first time you assign community service, or other volunteer work activities subject to FLSA limits.
  - For TANF Single Parent & Two Parent Families: Calculate the FLSA maximum allowed hours for volunteer work by adding together the family's TANF benefit amounts and the SNAP benefit amount, then divide by the federal minimum wage. If both parents in a two-parent family are involved in activities subject to FLSA, divide the hours between the parents. If only one parent is involved in this type of activity, that parent may complete the entire maximum-allowed hours for the family.
  - For TANF Sanctioned Families or Conditional Applicants: Calculate the FLSA maximum hours by dividing the monthly SNAP benefit amount by the minimum wage.

- Discuss the maximum hours with the participant, and make sure you arrange for additional activities if the FLSA maximum hours don't allow them to meet cooperation requirements in volunteer work.
- When a participant begins community service, or other volunteer work activity, document FLSA maximum hours for the month in case notes.
- For subsequent months, verify TANF benefit amounts each month a participant is engaged in a volunteer work activity:
  - If benefit amounts have changed from the previous month(s), recalculate the maximum hours and document in case notes. **Discuss any changes with the customer.**
  - If benefit amounts have not changed, document the FLSA maximum hours in case notes, as described above.
- Workforce Solutions Career Offices are responsible for assigning which staff carry out the above duties and for making sure FLSA calculations are accurate, timely, and correctly entered in the case management system.
- Staff may not schedule participants for volunteer activities beyond the allowed FLSA hours in any month. If a participant reports hours beyond the maximum allowed, let them know they are not required to volunteer over the maximum and that hours beyond the maximum do not count towards cooperation. Document this in case notes.

Notes*: Court-ordered community service is also subject to FLSA limitations.*

Time spent in work required as part of an occupational skills training program may be counted as work experience but is not subject to FLSA limitations. i.e. nursing program clinical.
Be sure to have a work experience agreement with the school making the work assignments.

Do not enter hours above the monthly FLSA maximum allowed in WIT for recording cooperation.

F. Community Service
Community service is a structured, supervised activity performed with a public or private nonprofit organization that provides a direct benefit to the community.

Work can be performed at schools, head-start programs, church, government, or non-profit agencies, or at an AmeriCorps, VISTA or other volunteer organization. The positions should be in fields such as healthcare, social service, environmental protection, education, urban and rural redevelopment, welfare, recreation, public facilities, public safety, and child care.

G. Work Experience

Work experience is a paid or unpaid work assignment designed to move a customer into regular employment as quickly as possible. Work experience may be a work activity or work-based learning.

A work activity:

- Provides participants opportunities to acquire skills, knowledge, and work habits necessary to obtain employment; and
- Improves employability of individuals who cannot find unsubsidized full-time employment.

Work-based learning:

- Is aligned with curriculum and instruction;
- Involves sustained interactions with industry professionals in real-world or simulated environments at an educational institution that fosters in-depth engagement with a career field;
- Emphasizes employer engagement;
- Includes specific training objectives;
- Leads to regular employment;
- Includes unsubsidized employment models; and
- May include the following activities:
    - Internships (a planned, structured learning experience that takes place in a workplace for a limited period of time);
    - Apprenticeships including pre-apprenticeships (a paid on-the-job training activity that is conducted under the supervision of an experienced worker with related classroom instruction);
    - On-the-job training as defined under WIOA; and
    - Includes unsubsidized employment models.

3.2. Required Participation Hours

The following chart summarizes the basic time participation requirements for cooperation in the TANF/Choices program:

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Family Situation</th><th>Cooperation Requirement (Total average hours)</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">TANF</td><td>Single parent with a child aged six and over</td><td>30+ hours/week</td></tr>
<tr><td>Single parent with a child under age six</td><td>20+ hours/week</td></tr>
<tr><td>Two-parent family without child care
One or both parents cooperate to meet the requirement.
Signed Family Cooperation Agreement form on file.</td><td>35+ hours/week</td></tr>
<tr><td>Two-parent family with child care
Both parents may cooperate to meet the requirement and the hours may be split among the two.
Signed Family Cooperation Agreement form on file.</td><td>55+ hours/week</td></tr>
<tr><td>Teen head of household attending school (middle school, high school, GED/HSE classes)
Attending school means the customer is enrolled in middle school, high school or GED/HSE classes. Teens attending school satisfactorily count as 20 hours or actual hours, whichever is greater.</td><td>Teen must have satisfactory school attendance.
During summer break, customer must cooperate a minimum of 20+ hours per week.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Teen head of household not attending school without GED/HSE or diploma</td><td>20+ hours/week</td></tr>
</table>

Family Situation		Cooperation Requirement (Total average hours)
	A teen not attending school must be participating in other educational activities or any other allowable activity for at least 20+ hours.	

TANF	*Disabled or caring for a disabled child or adult in the household* The family member no longer needs to attend school full- time to exclude a parent caring for a disabled family member.	Customer must cooperate the amount of time allowed by a physician – as stated on HHSC Form 1836A/B
	Sanctioned families must demonstrate cooperation for 4 consecutive weeks before the end of the month following the month in which the family failed to cooperate.	Hours/week are set according to family situation when not sanctioned.
	Conditional applicants have minimum-hour requirements for the prorated week based on their normal participation requirement Customer has 40 days from the date of referral from HHSC to attend orientation and demonstrate cooperation for 4 consecutive weeks.	Total hours per week set according to family situation when not sanctioned. See above. Customer must attend a workforce orientation, sign a new employment plan, if applicable, and demonstrate cooperation for four consecutive weeks.

	Exempt (Volunteer) parents or caretakers Children under six years Children six years and older Two-parent family without child care Two-parent family with child care	20+ hours/week 30+ hours/week 35+ hours/week 55+ hours/week

Note*: Participants must meet the minimum required hours in activities, however staff* <u>*should*</u> *encourage them to exceed these hours to account for weeks with split months or unforeseen circumstances preventing participation, such as short absences of one or two days.*

3.3. What Are the Limits on Activities?

There aren't any time limits for participation in any of the allowable activities for TANF/Choices.

At a minimum, staff must assess participants' progress in their current activity monthly and determine whether they should remain in the activity or transition to a different activity. Staff must document the participant's progress in case notes and update the ***Work Readiness Assessment*** and goals and objectives in the IEP as necessary.

3.4. Sequence of Services

The Choices Roadmap illustrates the order of services delivered in the Choices program. To properly document services, staff must follow these steps in the case management system:

- ***First Rule: Begin with Service 153 – Workforce Services Orientation*.***
- ***Second Rule: Enter both of the following services –***
  - ***203 – Comprehensive Objective Assessment,***
  - ***205 – Individual Employment Plan (IEP).***
- ***Third Rule: After entering 203 and 205, all other services designated for TANF/Choices are accessible, excluding Job Retention Services.***
- ***Fourth Rule: Once unsubsidized employment is obtained, Service 600 – Unsubsidized Employment, then Job Retention Services become available.***

****Note: Applies to TANF Applicants only.***

4. Incentives for Participation

Workforce Solutions offers incentives to participants in the TANF/Choices program to recognize achievements related to work and education/training goals listed in their IEP. These incentives are meant to motivate participants to meet their requirements and achieve specific milestones. Career office staff must work with each participant to set goals eligible for incentives and record them in the participant's IEP.

Incentive Guidelines:

- ***Incentives are not entitlements and are limited to $500 per program year (October 1 – September 30).***
- ***Incentives cannot be issued as direct cash payments.***
- ***Incentives must be tied to documented achievements in the participant's IEP related to work or education/training.***
- ***Documentation and justification must be recorded in case notes.***
- ***Incentives are not for milestones completed before Choices participation.***
- ***All participants must receive equal awards for similar achievements.***
- ***Incentives are subject to funding availability and issued at the discretion of Workforce Solutions staff.***

4.1. Achievements and Allowable Incentives

Incentives ae available for the following achievements if the participant meets their requirements:

- ***Completion of a Literacy Assessment (TABE or CASAS)***
  - ***$25 for each subject completed (reading, math, and language)***

- ***Measurable Skills Gain***
  Participants identified as basic skills deficient in reading or math must complete a post-test by the end of the first year after enrollment. Participants who successfully complete all Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) or Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) retesting requirements within 12 months from the date of their first service and who increase their TABE/CASAS score in reading or math by at least one grade level, may be eligible for an incentive for measurable skills gain. The participant's test results must be documented in WIT under the Assessment tab.
    - ***$50 for an increase in any subject***

- ***Adult Basic Education***

Completion of an adult basic education program such as English as a Second Language (ESL) or computer literacy.

  - ***$100 for completion of adult basic education program not included as part of a secondary or post-secondary program***
  - ***$100 for completing an Entrepreneurial Program***
  - ***$50 for completing a Financial Literacy Program***

- *High School or Equivalent Certificate*
  Obtainment of a high school diploma or certificate of high school equivalency.
  - ***$100 for earning a High School Diploma***
  - ***$25 for each of the four (4) high school equivalency subjects successfully passed OR***
  - ***$100 for passing all four (4) parts of the high school equivalency***

- *Occupational/Vocational Training*
  Completion of an occupational training program and/or obtainment of a credential or license.
  - ***$200 for completion of an Associate's degree***
  - ***$200 for completion of a certificate program (e.g., CNA, HVAC, Welding)***
  - ***$200 for obtaining an industry-recognized credential (e.g., LVN, Plumber, Electrician)***

- *Work Readiness*
  - ***$50 for completion of a skilled track or pathway in Metrix***
  - ***$25 for attending a seminar***

- *Subsidized Employment*
  - ***$75 for completing 50% (120 hours) of the work assignment***
  - ***$75 for completion of the entire work assignment***

- *Employment*
  - ***$100 for initial verified employment***
    - ***$25 for continued employment of at least 30 days***
    - ***$50 for 60 days***
    - ***$75 for 90 days***
  - ***$150 for initial increased wages from unsubsidized employment***

- *Community Service*
  - ***$50 for completing two weeks of work assignment***
  - ***$50 for completing four weeks of work assignment***

4.1.1. **Payment Options**

Incentives may be provided via:

- ***Prepaid cash card with no cash-back option***
- ***Gift certificate or store voucher***
- ***Prepaid merchant gift cards with no cash-back option***
- ***Prepaid gas cards***
- ***Prepaid mobile phone cards or pay-as-you-go cards***

4.2. Unallowable Payments

The following are not allowable payments:

- ***Cash, checks, or cards that can be redeemed for cash (incentives can be assigned a monetary value but must have no actual redeemable monetary value other than through acquisition of the good or service); and***
- ***Entertainment-related items, such as movie or sporting event tickets or gift cards to movie theaters or other venues whose sole purpose is entertainment. Entertainment includes amusement, diversion, and social activities and their associated costs.***

Incentives are intended to recognize achievements and complement services, not to serve as emergency assistance. Participants needing emergency assistance should be referred to the appropriate agency(ies).

4.3. Processing Incentives

Staff <u>must</u>:

Indicate the specific goals/actions eligible for incentives in the participant's IEP (see Type of Incentives); and

Document in case notes:

- ***The type of achievement completed;***
- ***Supporting documentation received;***
- ***The type and amount of the incentive; and***
- ***The date the incentive will be provided.***

    Example: John Doe completed Pipe Welding training and provided his certificate of completion on 6/14/2024. Workforce Solutions will provide John with an incentive in the form of a $150 Wal-Mart gift card. John and I completed the financial assistance request form, and it has been approved. John will come into the office to pick up his incentive on 6/17/2024.

Management must verify the participant is eligible for the incentive and check for proper documentation of the milestone achieved:

- ***Supporting documentation of the completed goal is in the documentation management system; and***

- ***Education or employment information has been updated in the case management system.***

Staff must follow the normal procedures for providing support services as detailed in the [Financial Aid Standards and Guidelines](#) (see section 6.0 Providing Support Service).

5. When Do We Excuse Required Participation?

Sometimes participants are unable to meet cooperation requirements for a reason that allows us to excuse them. Good cause is the name we give to a temporary excused absence from Workforce Solutions activities and cooperation requirements for an acceptable reason.

Staff must ensure that a good cause determination meets the following criteria:

- Based on individual or family circumstances;
- Determined through face-to-face or telephone contact;
- Applies to temporary periods preventing attendance at scheduled appointments or participation in ongoing activities;
- Promptly identified upon learning of the change in circumstances;
- Conditional on efforts to address barriers hindering participation;
- Monitored monthly with updates shared with HHSC if circumstances change;
- Extended in the case management system if issues persist after considering available resources;
- Limited to 12 consecutive months per occurrence if due to family violence;
- Used to temporarily excuse participants with valid reasons for non-participation, not for administrative purposes.

5.1. Good Cause Determinations

We can grant a participant good cause for reasons including, but not limited to:

- Temporary illness or incapacitation
- Required appointments in a court of law;
- A need to care for a disabled family member in the home;
- A demonstrated lack of available transportation and distance for participation prohibits walking; or a demonstrated lack of a job within reasonable commuting distance;
  - We define a *reasonable commuting distance* to be two hours. In general, a distance is considered reasonable if it takes two hours or less to travel to the child care provider and from there to the work site or from the work site to the child care provider and back to the customer’s home.
  - For participants who walk to a child care provider and from there to work, a reasonable distance is considered to be under a total of 1 1/2 miles each way.
  - For individuals who travel by car or bus, a reasonable distance is considered to be two hours or less. Factors such as, the length of time on the bus, the frequency of bus runs, the number of bus connections, (including wait times) and whether the individual

receives rides in addition to others who are also dropped off or picked up must be taken into consideration.
- For individuals who own cars, a reasonable distance is considered to be two hours or less. Reasonable costs are considered to be affordable if the cost of gas, car maintenance and car insurance to travel to a child care provider is no more than the individual's cost to travel to their work site, shopping centers (including grocery and department stores) or medical facilities.

- A demonstrated inability to find or obtain child care which is necessary to allow the customer to participate;
- A lack of support services;
- An individual/family crisis or circumstance that precludes participation, such as substance abuse, mental health, and disability-related issues (as long as the customer participates in services to help resolve problems, such as counseling or treatment);
- A circumstance in which the participant is the victim of family violence;
- A receipt of a job referral resulting in an offer of work at a wage impermissibly below the federal minimum wage; or
- A work schedule conflict.

5.1.1. Guidelines for Determining Good Cause

- Before granting good cause, staff must assess the participant's situation through direct conversation. This assessment should be conducted at least monthly to determine if the good cause status should be extended.
- During good cause status, support services are generally discontinued, except for child care, unless these services are needed to address barriers that led to the good cause determination
- If medical documentation or Form 1836A/B indicates the participant cannot work for less than six months, grant good cause and request updated documentation prior to the end of time identified on the medical documentation to continue granting good cause.
- If a participant reports a change in their good cause status or staff suspect a change, request an updated medical statement.
- If a participant reports permanent disability, request supporting documentation, grant good cause, and contact HHSC to update the participant's work code. Do **<u>not</u>** penalize participants with documented permanent disabilities. Document this in case notes.
- **Do not document a customer's medical diagnosis in case notes.**
- Good cause should be granted for the service month when the participant cannot meet requirements. The service should be open only for the period the participant is unable to participate in other

services. If good cause applies to only part of the month, close other services before starting good cause and close it before opening subsequent services.

- Enter good cause only if the participant cannot meet their monthly participation requirement.
- A good cause service cannot overlap with a service for tracking activity. Adjust the good cause service dates to reflect only the time in the month when the participant did not have cooperation hours.
- Document all relevant information from Form 1836A/B on the 1836A/B ribbon. Other forms or physician statements do not require an entry on this tab. If Form 1836A/B indicates the participant cannot work for a specified period, this counts as a reduced work requirement of zero hours.
- Always document conversations about good cause status in case notes, including:
  - Date of initial good cause approval;
  - Confirmation of whether circumstances remain the same or explaining any changes.
- Store copies of medical documentation confidentially in the document management system.

5.1.2. Things to Consider before Granting Good Cause

- If the customer can participate for additional hours in subsequent weeks to meet the monthly requirements, do not grant good cause. Instead, work with the participant to create a plan for full cooperation for the month.
- If the participant cannot engage in their current activity, explore their ability to participate in another allowable activity. Do not grant good cause if they can engage in an alternative activity.
- Ensure that sanctioned families and conditional applicants receive good cause determinations during periods of demonstrated cooperation, if applicable.
- For a participant in late-term pregnancy whose doctor has not restricted work, discuss how she can cooperate. If she feels it is not the right time to seek employment, offer opportunity to prepare for job search through other activities such as workshops, school, community service.
- Many participants with disabilities can work or search for work and may need assistance in planning and pursuing employment goals. If they meet a reduced work requirement, do not impose penalties.
- Require a doctor’s statement if a participant states they cannot participate due to their own or a family member’s illness for more than three days.

5.2. Holiday Excused Absences

- For TANF/Choices participants in unsubsidized employment, paid holidays or other paid leave count as actual cooperation hours.
- For participants in volunteer work, an excused absence due to a holiday counts as actual participation if:
  - They were scheduled to participate at the time of the absence;
  - The total number of excused absences does not exceed 80hours in a 12-month period; with no more than 16 hours per month.
- If employers or service providers are closed on the following dates, we will consider the date to be a holiday for customers in an unpaid work activity:
  - New Year's Day
  - Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
  - Washington's Birthday
  - Memorial Day
  - Independence Day
  - Labor Day
  - Columbus Day
  - Veterans Day
  - Thanksgiving Day
  - Christmas Day
- When entering hours, staff should include holiday hours under the "Holiday" section as applicable.

5.3. Short-Term Excused Absences

Short-term excused absences, which are for reasons similar to good cause, are allowed for one or two days and are limited to 80 hours within a 12-month period, with a maximum of 16 hours per month. This limit does not apply to holiday excused absences.

- Short-term excused absences apply to one day at a time and can only be granted for unpaid activities. The hours credited cannot exceed the number of hours the participant was scheduled to participate. Hours we credit to a short-term excused absence cannot exceed the number of hours the customer was scheduled to participate.
- When entering hours, staff should record short-term excused hours under "Excused Absence."

***Note**: Staff must verify that the entry covers both the holiday and short-term excused absence dates to ensure hours count for participation.*

5.4. Reduced Work Requirements

Staff may discover a change in the participant's family situation or personal circumstances during an interview or other contact that affects their requirement to look for and go to work.

- If a participant has a disability or cares for a disabled family member and cannot meet the full work requirement, instruct them to have their doctor complete Form H1836 A/B and assist in developing a plan for reduced participation requirements.
- Use Form H1836A or other medical documentation to record the number of hours a participant with a disability can participate.
- Use Form H1836B or other medical documentation to record the hours a participant caring for a disabled family member can participate.
- Staff must ensure that sanctions are not requested for Choices participants who meet the reduced hours specified on Form H1836 A/B.
- Staff must document all relevant information in the case management system under the H1836A/B tab.
- Staff must record any changes in required work hours if new documentation (Form H1836A/B) is submitted.

5.4.1. Guidelines for Reduced Work Requirements

- Single-parent families have a reduced work requirement if the physician specifies fewer than 30 hours.
- Single-parent families with a child under age six have a reduced work requirement if the physician specifies fewer than 20 hours.
- Two-parent families have a reduced work requirement if the physician specifies fewer than 35 hours (without child care) or 55 hours (with child care).

Special Provisions for Two-parent Families

- If one adult in a two-parent family is a mandatory participant with Form H1836A/B and the other is exempt, the work requirement is met if the mandatory adult fulfills their requirement.
- If both adults are mandatory participants with Form H1836A/B, each must meet their respective work requirements for the family to be complaint.
- If one adult is a mandatory participant with Form H1836A/B and the other meets their requirement without good cause, the family's work requirement is met.

5.5. Voluntary Withdrawal

Participants may choose to voluntarily withdraw from the TANF/Choices program due to personal reasons. When a participant decides to withdraw, staff should guide them to complete Form H1802, Voluntary Withdrawal from TANF. This form provides information on continued Medicaid eligibility, other services, and the consequences of withdrawal.

Staff must:

- Inform the participant they must continue meeting participation requirements until the withdrawal is processed. Failure to cooperate may result in a penalty.
- Send the signed original Form H1802 to HHSC;
- Provide the customer with a copy of the form;
- Store a copy in the customer's file; and
- Document the date the form was sent to HHSC in case notes.

Note*: Voluntary withdrawal from TANF/Choices does not affect the participant's eligibility for child care assistance.*

6. Reporting and Documenting Participation

6.1. How Do Participants Report Time?

Individuals who must cooperate with Workforce Solutions must demonstrate that they are engaging in activities for the required amounts of time. We have a set of specific rules for which participants and staff must follow about documenting (i.e., writing it down) and verifying time (i.e., supporting or proving the customer actually engaged in an activity for the reported length of time).

We count the actual time spent in most activities (job search and job readiness, education and training activities, and work) with the exception of self-employment. Tracking Unit staff records attendance in a clock format (hh:mm) in the case management system.

We require verification for time spent in all education/training and work activities.

6.1.1. Job Search & Job Readiness Activities

- Participants report their time to us using the Workforce Solutions *Job Search Log* or other acceptable documents.
- Signatures of Workforce Solutions staff on the completed Workforce Solutions *Supervised Job Search Report* form serve as documentation for time spent in supervised job search.
- A participant must deliver Job Search Logs to their career office each week, on the day which office staff has specified to them in the manner which they have arranged with staff.
- Staff are responsible for reviewing a Job Search Log for completeness and accuracy and providing advice to the participant about their job search efforts.
- Based on guidance from TWC, participants cannot conduct online job search at home. TWC distinguishes between online job search and applying for a job online. A participant may apply for jobs online at home and document their application efforts on the Job Search Log.

6.1.2. Education and Work Activities

- For education/training, volunteer work and employment, participants report their time and activity to us using the Workforce Solutions *Verification of Hours* form, paycheck stubs, online documentation sources, or other payroll documentation, attendance records from the service provider, a letter or email directly from the employer, or self-employment invoices, copies of checks, or receipts.

- A participant may fax, mail or hand-deliver Verification of Hours forms to their career office on or by the day office staff have specified to them that the forms or other documentation is due.
- For ongoing monthly verification of a self-employment enterprise, a customer must submit:
  - Documentation that provides information on the amount of income generated and the associated business expenses, which must include invoices signed by their clients/customers and contain:
    - client/customer names and contact information;
    - dates and locations of services provided;
    - amounts received; and
  - Business expense receipts that substantiate the expenses to be deducted from the gross income, when applicable.

6.1.3. Alternative Arrangements

Participants engaged in TANF/Choices may face difficulties obtaining weekly verification of their activities. For example, an employer or instructor might refuse to sign the Verification of Hours form each week. In these instances, staff should work with the participant to establish an alternative verification method. To count towards participation, hours must be submitted according to the agreed arrangement. Refer to Documentation Requirements for Cooperation for acceptable verification documents.

Staff must document the agreed-upon arrangements in case notes and remind the participant that failure to meet cooperation requirements may result in a penalty.

Example 1: *John is working as a Scheduler at a medical service company. His supervisor says he doesn't have time to sign John's Verification of Hours form each week. Staff makes an arrangement with John to submit an unsigned Verification of Hours form each week and a copy of his paycheck stub semi-monthly, as he gets paid. Staff documents the arrangement in case notes and reminds John that his paycheck stubs are needed for him to prove cooperation in the Choices program.*

Example 2: *Jane is attending basic education classes at a community college to prepare for the GED exam. She explained to her instructor that she is working with Workforce Solutions to find employment and asks her instructor to complete the Attendance Report form. The instructor agrees to sign the form biweekly, after the class is scheduled to take tests. Jane* *agrees to submit the signed Attendance Report form to Workforce Solutions every two weeks. Staff documents the arrangement in case notes and reminds Jane that she must continue to submit her signed attendance reports as agreed.*

6.2. How Do We Review and Record Time?

Participants are required to provide documentation for the time spent in any allowable activity.

6.2.1. Calculating and Recording Hours

- It is <u>very important to accurately count and enter the correct cooperation hours</u> for the week. The hours entered in WIT must <u>exactly match</u> the hours that are documented.
- Cooperation hours are recorded weekly from Sunday through Saturday. If the office staff believes the hours a participant has reported are false or inaccurate, staff will investigate before recording the hours and enter a case note to document the participant's explanation.
- ***Partial hours can be entered in WIT and will be automatically rounded at the end of the month. Enter partial hours using click format (hh:mm) i.e. 1 hour and 15 minutes is entered 1:15.***
- ***WIT will calculate total hours and round appropriately.***

6.2.2. Calculation Scenarios

<u>Straight Cooperation:</u> If the participant completed all cooperation hours (with no excused absence or state-approved holiday hours), you may divide the total number of hours by seven when you don't have verification for daily hours. If the ending calculation results in an even number, record the same number of hours for each day.

Note*: If you have documented and verified hours by day, enter the daily totals.*

Example: *Mark worked at Target 35 hours for the week, and you have a pay check showing 35 hours for the entire period. Divide 35 by seven and enter five hours for each day.*

Activity: Unsubsidized Employment-35 hours

Sun.	*Mon.*	*Tues.*	*Wed.*	*Thurs.*	*Fri.*	*Sat.*
7/15	*7/16*	*7/17*	*7/18*	*7/19*	*7/20*	*7/21*

5	*5*	*5*	*5*	*5*	*5*	*5*

If the ending calculation results in a decimal format number, divide the total number by seven and record the daily average for 6 days of the week. Adjust the hours for the remaining day to ensure that the total hours entered, exactly match the total hours documented.

Example: *Beth worked at Hobby Lobby 31 hours for the week, and you have a pay stub showing 31 hours for the entire period. Divide 31 by seven (4.428 rounded up to 4.43) and enter 4.43 for six days. Subtract 26.58 (4.43 times six) from 31 and enter 4.42 hours for the seventh day.*

Activity: Unsubsidized Employment-31 hours

Sun.	*Mon.*	*Tues.*	*Wed.*	*Thurs.*	*Fri.*	*Sat.*
7/15	*7/16*	*7/17*	*7/18*	*7/19*	*7/20*	*7/21*
4.43	*4.43*	*4.43*	***4.42***	*4.43*	*4.43*	*4.43*

If the week includes both supervised job search hours and self-directed job search recorded on the job search log, use the daily totals. Enter the daily total in WIT. It is not necessary to divide by seven.

Example: *Carol reported six hours of supervised job search in a Workforce Solutions office on Monday. She reported two interviews – one for two hours and the other for one hour on Tuesday. She had a combined total of seven hours job search on Wednesday, eight hours of supervised job search in our office on Thursday. On Friday, she had two interviews – one for two hours and one for one hours. She applied online to five companies totaling one hour and worked under supervision in our office for two hours.*

Activity: Job Search – 14 hours

Sun.	*Mon.*	*Tues.*	*Wed.*	*Thurs.*	*Fri.*	*Sat.*
7/15	*7/16*	*7/17*	*7/18*	*7/19*	*7/20*	*7/21*
0	*0*	*3*	*7*	*0*	*4*	*0*

Activity: Supervised Job Search – 16 hours

Sun.	*Mon.*	*Tues.*	*Wed.*	*Thurs.*	*Fri.*	*Sat.*
7/15	*7/16*	*7/17*	*7/18*	*7/19*	*7/20*	*7/21*
0	*6*	*0*	*0*	*8*	*2*	*0*

If the week **includes an excused absence or state approved holiday** or both, first subtract those days from the weekly seven days and divide the total number of hours left by the number of remaining days. Use this method when you don't have a verification of daily hours.

Example: *Susan reported 24 hours of community service for the week. Her work location was closed for one day on Friday for a state-approved holiday. If it had been open, she would have worked an additional six hours. Six hours should be recorded for the holiday on Friday. The remaining 24 hours would be divided by six days to calculate the average daily participation for the rest of the week (four hours each day).*

Activity: Community Service: 24 hours; Excused Absence: 6 hours

Sun.	*Mon.*	*Tues.*	*Wed.*	*Thurs.*	*Fri.*	*Sat.*
7/15	*7/16*	*7/17*	*7/18*	*7/19*	*7/20*	*7/21*
4	*4*	*4*	*4*	*4*	*6*	*4*

If the participant is **cooperating in two different activities and <u>both activities are open for the entire week,</u>** divide the total number of hours by seven and record the daily average. Use this method when you don't have a verification of daily hours.

Example: *Susan volunteered for 35 hours and worked for 20 hours*.

Activity: Volunteer Work - 35 hours

Sun.	*Mon.*	*Tues.*	*Wed.*	*Thurs.*	*Fri.*	*Sat.*
7/15	*7/16*	*7/17*	*7/18*	*7/19*	*7/20*	*7/21*

5	*5*	*5*	*5*	*5*	*5*	*5*

Activity: Unsubsidized Employment-20 hours

Sun.	*Mon.*	*Tues.*	*Wed.*	*Thurs.*	*Fri.*	*Sat.*
7/15	*7/16*	*7/17*	*7/18*	*7/19*	*7/20*	*7/21*
2.86	*2.86*	*2.86*	*2.86*	*2.86*	*2.84*	*2.86*

If the participant is **cooperating in two different activities and the <u>activities begin or end during the week</u>**, enter the actual number of hours per day that they participated.

Example: Robert job searched for 28 hours (seven hours on Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday). He was hired by Burger King and worked a total of 16 hours on Friday and Saturday.

Activity: Job Search-28 hours

Sun.	*Mon.*	*Tues.*	*Wed.*	*Thurs.*	*Fri.*	*Sat.*
7/15	*7/16*	*7/17*	*7/18*	*7/19*	*7/20*	*7/21*
7	*0*	*7*	*0*	*7*	*7*	*0*

Activity: Unsubsidized Employment-16 hours

Sun.	*Mon.*	*Tues.*	*Wed.*	*Thurs.*	*Fri.*	*Sat.*
7/15	*7/16*	*7/17*	*7/18*	*7/19*	*7/20*	*7/21*
0	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*8*	*8*

<u>If one month ends and another month begins</u> during the week, divide the total number of hours by seven and record the daily average in the appropriate month. Use this method when you don't have a verification of daily hours.

Example: *Morgan volunteered for 35 hours July 29 through August 4. Divide 35 by seven and enter 15 hours for July (five hours. each day) and 20 hours for August (five hours each day).*

March Activity: Volunteer Work -20 hours

Sun.	*Mon.*	*Tues.*	*Wed.*	*Thurs.*	*Fri.*	*Sat.*
7/29	*7/30*	*7/31*	*8/01*	*8/02*	*8/03*	*8/04*
5	*5*	*5*	*5*	*0*	*0*	*0*

April Activity: Volunteer Work -15 hours

Sun.	*Mon.*	*Tues.*	*Wed.*	*Thurs.*	*Fri.*	*Sat.*
7/15	*7/16*	*7/17*	*7/18*	*7/19*	*7/20*	*7/21*
0	*0*	*0*	*0*	*5*	*5*	*5*

6.2.3. Reporting Cooperation in WIT

- Enter participation hours in the TANF/Choices Program Application: Attendance Ribbon, Attendance Tracker.
  - Select the appropriate year, and month from the drop-down menu
  - Actual Hour Enty Type; select Daily Only. This opens the Daily Actual Completed Hours (ACH) column for editing.
  - Select the link for the desired Activity/Provider
  - Enter the attendance hours in the format hh:mm (00:00)
- Click the Save Attendance button.

7. Penalties for Non-Cooperation

7.1. When and How Do We Penalize?

We impose penalties upon customers who have not cooperated with us. This includes (1) individuals who don't respond to one of our outreach letters and (2) individuals who don't cooperate with requirements.

The first time a TANF customer fails to cooperate, we will send a warning or non-compliance letter. This serves the customer with notice and is our timely and reasonable attempt to contact the customer after seeing that they are not cooperating. In some cases, we negotiate a Make-Up Hours Agreement with the customer. If the customer fails to meet the terms of the Make-Up Hours Agreement, the customer will be penalized.

When we initiate a penalty, we start the process to remove a customer's TANF cash benefits and the adult family member's Medicaid benefits.

Remember:

- We verify cooperation weekly to ensure that customers:
  - comply with cooperation requirements as set forth in their family employment plan(s); or
  - have good reason for not cooperating.
- We don't initiate a penalty for TANF applicants or exempt TANF customers who volunteer to cooperate then later choose not to cooperate. We do immediately stop any Workforce Solutions financial aid.
- Effective, August 1, 2019, all scheduler appointments created for non-compliance must include the customer's date of non-compliance.

7.1.1. No Response to an Outreach Letter

Workforce Solutions mails outreach letters to TANF customers who are required to cooperate with us and haven't yet received an orientation. The letter tells the customer when they must respond and the consequences for failing to respond.

Customers must respond by 12 pm on the seventh calendar day from the date of the letter. If a customer fails to respond and does not have a good cause reason for failing to respond, our procedure for initiating a penalty is as follows:

On the seventh day from the date of the outreach letter, Tracking Unit staff checks the customer record to determine if they responded by the deadline. The Tracker looks for one of the following as evidence:

- ➢ A case note indicating the customer participated in an orientation

- A rescheduled orientation appointment
- A case note indicating good cause

If the customer hasn't responded by 12 pm, the Tracker initiates a penalty in the customer's record in WIT by 5 pm on the seventh day.

Sun - 10/4	Mon - 10/5	Tues - 10/6 Outreach letter sent Day 1	Wed - 10/7 Day 2	Thurs - 10/8 Day 3	Fri - 10/9 Day 4	Sat - 10/10 Day 5
Sun - 10/11 Day 6	Mon - 10/12 Customer required to respond by 12 pm. Trackers take action by 5pm. Day 7	Tues - 10/13	Wed - 10/14	Thurs - 10/15	Fri - 10/16	Sat - 10/17

7.1.2. No Cooperation

During an orientation, we give customer instructions about how to report their cooperation to Workforce Solutions. The customer must submit their proof of cooperation each Monday unless the office is closed for holiday/emergency. If the office is closed on Monday, the customer's proof of cooperation is due on Tuesday and all our tracking entries move forward one day. **Customers sign family employment plans to show they agree to the plan's requirements and that they will cooperate by following instructions provided by staff.**

A customer cooperates with Workforce Solutions by participating in the activities they have agreed to carry out for the number of required hours, or by reporting back to us – and receiving approval from us – for good cause, a short-term excused absence, reduced requirements, or reconsideration.

We must make an attempt to contact the customer about their non-cooperation within one business day of the date of non-cooperation. We do this with a non-cooperation letter or with the Make-Up Hours Agreement. The non-cooperation letter serves as our timely and reasonable attempt to contact the customer. Examples below explain when to use the letter and when to use the Agreement.

When the customer does not comply with requirements, and they have not already signed a Make-Up Hours Agreement, the Tracker sends a non-cooperation letter by Tuesday of the week after they do not prove compliance. This letter warns the customer that they must comply within four calendar days or we will initiate a penalty and they will lose their benefits.

Again, *comply with requirements* means the customer provides to us, on the date we specify (e.g. Monday, unless the office is closed), and in the format we have requested, a record and proof that they are engaging in the activities required as a part of their employment plan for the required number of hours.

You might send several non-cooperation letters during a 12-month period year if a customer returns to cooperating with us after receiving a non-cooperation letter, but then some point in the future again fails to cooperate.

Example 1: *The customer does not report as instructed on Monday, July 2nd.*
We discover the non-compliance for customers failing to report to us on Monday through reports we run on Tuesday, July 3rd.

- We send a non-cooperation letter on the day of discovery, Tuesday, July 3rd, giving the customer four days to report. They must report by Friday, July 6th.
- They do not come in by Friday, July 6th, and we discover that they did not report to any office when we review the reports on Monday, July 9th.

We sanction the customer on Monday, July 9th using a non-cooperation date of Monday, July 2nd - because that is the date they failed to report and participate as required.

Example 2: *The customer does report to the office on or before the date required on our non-compliance letter, but they do not have sufficient hours when they report. Staff has the following options:*

Option 1: Give the customer a Make-Up Hours Agreement if the two of you believe they can reasonably make up the hours by the end of the month.

1. Come to an agreement with the customer when they are in the office on how they can make up enough hours to meet their monthly cooperation.
2. Ask the customer to sign the Make-Up Hours Agreement. Always require her to report her cooperation hours on the following Monday, or the last day of the month, whichever comes first. In this example, ask her to return on Monday, July 16th.
3. Give her a copy of the Agreement and file the original.
4. Post a counselor note labeled "Make-Up Agreement". State the terms of the agreement including dates to report and number of hours required each week.
5. Data enter all her verified hours on the date they give them to us.

Do not penalize this customer.

Option 2: If it isn't reasonable to expect that the customer will be able to meet her monthly cooperation requirements by the end of the month, don't execute a Make-Up Hours Agreement – penalize the customer.

1. You mailed the customer a non-cooperation letter on Tuesday, July 17th, telling the customer they must report with cooperation by Friday, July 20th.
2. The customer comes in on or before Friday, July 20th, but does not have enough hours and cannot possibly make up the required hours by the end of the month.
3. Explain to the customer it appears they will not meet cooperation for the month. Tell the customer we will have to notify HHSC that they have not complied with the requirements and they will likely lose benefits. Send a notice to the tracking unit to sanction the customer.

Note: *When we do not have a Make-Up Hours Agreement, the non-cooperation date is the date of the non-cooperation letter.*

Example 3: After receiving the non-cooperation letter we sent on Tuesday, July 17th, the customer comes to the office as instructed on Friday, July 20th, but does not have sufficient hours. They sign a Make-Up Agreement agreeing to provide a record and proof of her cooperation based on the plan in the agreement by Tuesday, July 31st. They do not cooperate as agreed by Tuesday, July 31st.

1. We confirm the customer's non-cooperation in the case management system by Wednesday, August 1st.
2. We sanction the customer on Wednesday, August 1st with a non-cooperation date of Tuesday, July 31st, the date they agreed to cooperate in their Agreement.

Note: *When we do have a Make-Up Hours Agreement, the non-compliance date is the date they agreed to cooperate in the Agreement and did not meet the requirement in the Agreement-always a Monday or the last day of the month.*

Example 4: The customer reports as required on Monday, July 16th, for their first appointment after TANF certification and gives us her cooperation hours. They do not have sufficient hours. The customer has not received a non-cooperation letter.

1. Follow the instructions on Example 2 by using your judgment about giving the customer a Make-Up Hours Agreement.
2. In this example you and the customer sign a Make-Up Hours Agreement stating they will return on Monday, July 23rd, with 35 hours and Tuesday, July 31st with 35 hours.
3. They return with 36 hours on Monday, July 23rd but delivers only 30 hours on Tuesday, July 31st.
4. You sanction the customer no later than Tuesday, August 5th with a non-cooperation date of Tuesday, July 31st – the date they did not comply with the Agreement.

Note: *When a customer meets their monthly cooperation requirement earlier than required by the agreement, do not sanction them because they did not meet a later weekly requirement.*

The Tracker manages the customer's program application detail by leaving it open until the end of the month following the month in which they initiated the penalty.

- If the customer meets cooperation or we grant good cause for the month after the penalty, the program application remains open.

- If the customer has not sufficiently returned to cooperating and we did not grant good cause for the month after the penalty, the Tracker closes the program application at the end of the month after the penalty.
- In some cases, the Tracker finds that HHSC has restored benefits to a customer who did not meet participation. Keep the Program Detail open, check with HHSC before resubmitting the sanction, and continue to track cooperation.

TANF – Exempt (i.e., Volunteers to Cooperate)
- We do not initiate penalties in WIT for voluntary TANF customers.
- An exempt customer must "comply with requirements" by providing us, on the date we specify and in the format we have requested, a record and supporting proof that they are engaging in the activities required as a part of their employment plan for the required number of hours.
- If the exempt customer does not comply, we must warn them with a non-cooperation letter or the Make-Up Hours Agreement that they will lose her Workforce Solutions Financial Aid if they do not meet their requirements.
- We follow the same procedures for warning the exempt customer as noted above for Mandatory Customers.
- If the customer doesn't fix their failure to comply, or give us good reason for not cooperating, the Tracker will close the case within 2 days of the customer's failure to comply and open an interruption period if the customer is receiving financial aid for child care.

TANF Applicant
- We ask a TANF applicant to begin cooperating as soon as they come to the office and before they are certified to receive TANF benefits.
- If a TANF Applicant has a pending TANF application at Health & Human Services Commission and needs to attend an orientation to complete the application process, a Career Advisor must conduct the orientation. Career Advisors must not deny the customer from attending the orientation due to their interview date.
- The customer's required cooperation does not start until they are certified to receive TANF.

7.2. How Do Individuals Come Back?

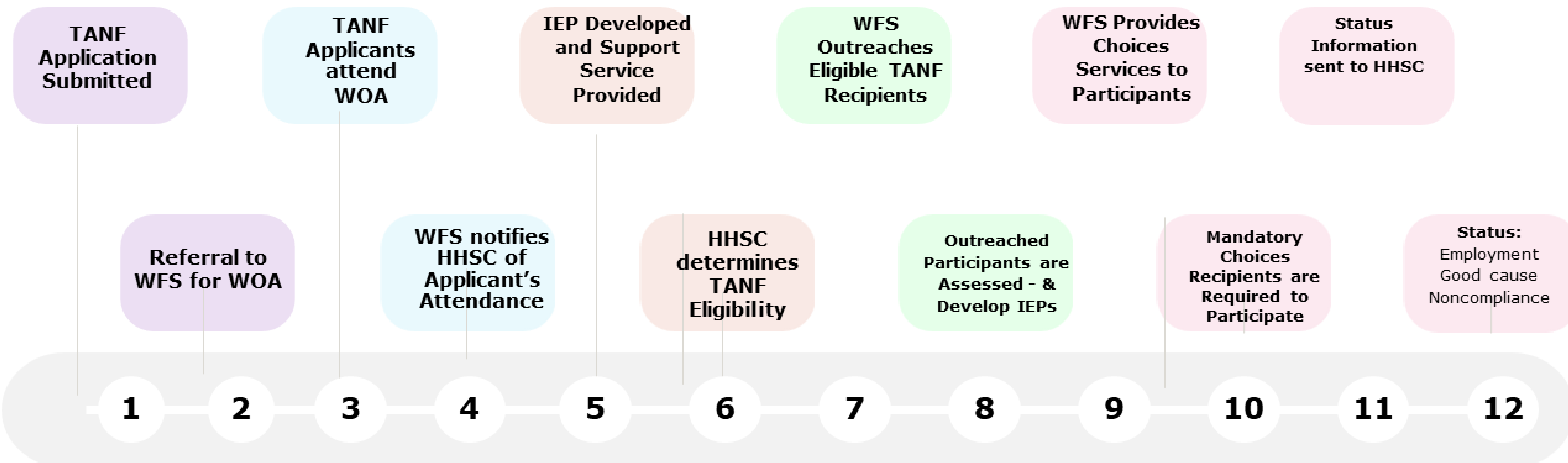
To regain TANF benefits and Workforce Solutions services after a penalty, participants must follow these steps:

- Conditional applicants and sanctioned families must demonstrate cooperation for four consecutive weeks to become eligible for TANF cash assistance reinstatement.
- Staff will immediately notify HHSC if a:
    - Sanctioned family, previously denied TANF cash assistance due to noncooperation, demonstrates full cooperation for four consecutive weeks before the end of the month following the noncooperation period;
    - Conditional applicant, whose TANF case was closed due to two or more months of noncooperation, meets full cooperation for four consecutive weeks.
    - Sanctioned family or conditional applicant is granted good cause during the cooperation period.

Appendix A

TANF CHOICES ROADMAP

Delivery of Services



Last Update: 04/11/2024

Appendix B
Types of Incentives – Limit Per Customer Per Program Year $500

Achievements	Definition	Amount	Supporting Documentation
Literacy Assessment	Completion of the TABE or CASAS	$25 for each subject completed	Test scores in WIT under the Assessment tab
Measurable Skills Gain	Increase at least one functional/grade level on the TABE or CASAS	$50	Test scores in WIT under the Assessment tab
Adult Basic Education	Completion of an adult basic education program, ESL, or computer literacy	$100 for ABE $100 for Entrepreneurial Program $50 for Financial Literacy	Certificate of completion
High School or Equivalency	Obtainment of a high school diploma or certificate of high school equivalency	$100 for HS diploma $25 for each HSE subject passed OR $100 for passing all four parts of HSE	High school diploma, certificate of high school equivalency or copy of transcript
Occupational/Vocational Training	Completion of a training program and/or obtainment of an occupational/vocational credential or license.	$200 for Associate's degree $200 for completion of a certificate program $200 for an industry-recognized credential	Certificate of completion, copy of license/credential, or copy of transcript
Work Readiness	Completion of assigned work readiness activities	$50 for completion of skilled track in Metrix $25 for attending a seminar	Certificate of completion or verification of hours through Metrix Signed Supervised Job Search Form
Subsidized Employment	Completion of 50% of assigned WBL hours	$75	WBL training plan, documented in case notes
	Successful completion of all assigned hours	$75	
Community Service	Completion of community service assignment	$50 for two weeks $50 for four weeks	Signed VOH Form
Employment	Obtain unsubsidized employment	$100	Check stub or employment verification form
	Continued employment for 30 days	$25	
	Continued employment for 60 days	$50	
	Continued employment for 90 days	$75	
	Initial increase in wages	$150	

Appendix C

Table 1: TANF/Choices Work Codes

<table>
<tr><th>Workforce Solutions
TANF Work Code Description</th><th colspan="2">Work Codes</th><th>Classification for Choices Work Rate</th></tr>
<tr><td>Mandatory Registrant</td><td>M</td><td>1</td><td rowspan="9">Employment Expected or Ramp-Up</td></tr>
<tr><td>Certified Child Attending School</td><td>3</td><td>B</td></tr>
<tr><td>Disabled</td><td>5</td><td>D</td></tr>
<tr><td>Too Remote to Participate</td><td>10</td><td>I</td></tr>
<tr><td>Pending during Counseling or Appeal</td><td>12</td><td>K</td></tr>
<tr><td>Time-Limited Local Economic Factor</td><td>13</td><td>L</td></tr>
<tr><td>Employed of Self-Employed 30 or More Hours</td><td>15</td><td>P</td></tr>
<tr><td>Vista Volunteer</td><td>18</td><td>S</td></tr>
<tr><td>Failure to Comply with Choices Program</td><td>20</td><td>W</td></tr>
<tr><td>Failure to Comply with Choices Program (not in federal universe since 2006)</td><td>20</td><td>W</td><td rowspan="17">Employment Preferred</td></tr>
<tr><td>Child Under 16</td><td>2</td><td>A</td></tr>
<tr><td>Incapacitated</td><td>6</td><td>E</td></tr>
<tr><td>Age 60 or Older</td><td>7</td><td>F</td></tr>
<tr><td>Time-Limited: Employment Not Available</td><td>14</td><td>N</td></tr>
<tr><td>Time-Limited: Severe Personal Hardship</td><td>16</td><td>Q</td></tr>
<tr><td>Pregnant and unable to work</td><td>19</td><td>T</td></tr>
<tr><td>Single grandparent age 50 or over caring for a child under age 3</td><td>22</td><td>U</td></tr>
<tr><td>Legal Parent who exhausted State Time Limit with child(ren) receiving TANF</td><td>23</td><td>X</td></tr>
<tr><td>***Legal Parent Receiving SSI with Children Receiving TANF- Not included***</td><td>*24*</td><td>*V*</td></tr>
<tr><td>Other Disqualified Parent with child(ren) receiving TANF</td><td>25</td><td>Y</td></tr>
<tr><td>Exempt Due to Caring for an Ill or Disabled Child</td><td>4</td><td>C</td></tr>
<tr><td>Exempt Due to Caring for a Certified Child under age 1</td><td>8</td><td>G</td></tr>
<tr><td>Presence Required in Home to Care for an Ill or Disabled Adult</td><td>9</td><td>H</td></tr>
<tr><td>Exempt Due to Caring for a Non-Certified Child under age 1</td><td>17</td><td>R</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cares for a Disabled Child who does not attend School</td><td>21</td><td>Z</td></tr>
</table>

Table 2: List of Revisions

Note: The guide contains minor editorial changes that are not included on the List of Revisions. Some sections of the guide have been moved into other sections.

July 2024

SECTION	REVISION
1. Introduction	Updated to include the goal of the TANF/Choices program and referral from HHS to Workforce Solutions to help individuals obtain employment
2.4. Who Do We Outreach	Added guidance to enhance outreach methods and align with recent updates to state rules Added guidance for conditional applicants and TANF Applicants
3.1.2. Education and Training	Added guidance to record MSG and credential attainment in WIT Updated guidance for participation in Metrix
3.4. Sequence of Services	Added section to align with data entry requirements in WIT
4. Incentives for Participation	Added section to provide guidance for issuing incentives
6. Reporting & Documenting Participation	Updated guidance on counting actual time spent in most activities with the exception of self-employment Updated data entry for participation hours to clock format
Appendix	Added TANF/Choices Roadmap and Types of Incentives Chart

March 2023

SECTION	REVISION
Section 2: Requirements for Cooperation	
2.3 Workforce Orientation	Added guidance for staff to document in TWIST Counselor Notes the customer's preferred method of contact
2.6 How We Outreach	Added instructions to send outreach letters to all mailing addresses in TWIST
2.8.3 Work Activities	Added documentation for verification of self-employment for TANF/Choices customers Updated FLSA calculation for customers participating in SNAP E&T Updated guidelines for providing service under SNAP E&T retention funds

	Added guidance for establishing workfare slots for SNAP E&T ABAWDs
2.9 When Do We Excuse Required Participation	Added guidance requiring staff to store a customer's medical documentation in the document management system in a confidential file
Section 4: Penalties for Non-Cooperation	
4.2 No Respond to an Outreach Letter – TANF/Choices	Updated guidelines for a customer's response to the outreach letter to seven (7) days Updated example
Appendix	
Appendix: Table 1 TANF/Choices Work Codes	Added work code 24 (V**) -** Legal Parent Receiving SSI with Children Receiving TANF - Not included

August 2022

SECTION	**REVISION**
Section 2: Requirements for Cooperation	
2.3 Workforce Orientation	Added guidelines for staff when conducting orientations TANF/Choices: Added information about alternative orientation, literacy assessments (TABE) and two-parent families SNAP E&T: Added information for the provision of services for SNAP E&T customers
2.4 Reconsideration	Added guidelines for staff when determining that a SNAP E&T customer is unable to participate in any activities Added procedure for customers pending approval of a reconsideration
2.7 Basic Requirements	Added guidelines for staff to assess customers to determine the most appropriate activity based on the customer's situation Updated TANF and SNAP Activities charts Added guidelines for SNAP E&T customers who volunteer to participate and are employed 30+ hours Added instructions for staff to encourage customers to complete more than the minimum required participation hours
2.8 What Are the Limits on Activities?	Added information regarding the activities and limits for TANF and SNAP customers
2.8.1 Job Search and Job Readiness	Removed instructions to close SNAP General Population customers after four weeks

2.8.2 Education and Training	Added guidelines to co-enroll TANF and SNAP customers into WIOA funds to facilitate successful completion of training Added information about online learning courses including Metrix and Choices full engagement, and corresponding service codes
2.8.3 Work Activities	Added work-based literacy to the work activities allowable under TANF/Choices Added work experience as an allowable volunteer work activity under TANF/Choices and SNAP E&T
2.9.1 Good Cause TANF	Added information for staff when granting good cause Added clarification for reduced work requirements Added guidelines for staff when customers decide to voluntarily withdraw from TANF
Section 3: Reporting and Documenting Time for Cooperation	
3.1 How Do Customers Report Time?	Updated information on when we count actual time spent in allowable activities and when we round the time to the nearest hour Updated guidelines for verification of activities
3.1.3 Alternative Arrangements	Added instructions for arranging alternative ways for customers to submit participation and/or verification of their activity hours
Section 4: Penalties for Non-Cooperation	
4.1 When and How Do We Penalize?	Updated definition for compliance period
4.1.1 No Response to an Outreach Letter	Added an example to non-cooperation for SNAP E&T