



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES



USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

November 2, 2020

Secretary
Department of Human Services

Dear Secretary:

As you know, prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency, our nation was experiencing unprecedented growth and economic vitality. Almost every demographic experienced historic employment rates. Now, within a matter of months, our way of life has changed, and for many that includes the means for supporting themselves and their families. As we engage in reopening, we invite you to join us in engaging unemployed individuals as we rebuild our economy. We know, and research confirms, that the longer an individual is disconnected from the workforce, the harder it is for that individual to return. For that reason, now is a crucial time for action – and we'd invite you to partner with us in that endeavor.

The last few months have been difficult for millions of Americans. Record numbers exited the workforce as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For some, the return to the labor force is a function of time and the reopening of certain businesses or industries. For others, including those who were not participating in the labor force prior to the pandemic, it will take a more comprehensive and coordinated public and private effort. In this moment, we, your federal partners, believe we have an even greater obligation to collaborate with you in addressing the needs of the unemployed.

We are responsible for administering three critical workforce development programs in three federal agencies:

- The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) promotes workforce preparation as one of the four statutory purposes for which TANF funds can be used. ACF encourages states, territories, and tribes to support job readiness and skill-focused training as allowable uses of TANF funds. ACF also provides discretionary funding for career pathways training.
- The U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) administers federal programs for workforce development and worker dislocation, federal grants to states for public employment service, and unemployment insurance benefits under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). These programs are operated primarily through state and local workforce development systems with support from federal and other funding sources.

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) offers the SNAP Employment and Training Program to states. This program helps SNAP participants gain skills, training, or work experience to increase their ability to obtain and maintain employment, thereby increasing self-sufficiency.

Together, we have a tremendous opportunity to maximize the effectiveness of our programs in a post-COVID-19 economic recovery to help more families experience the benefits of work. Aligning and leveraging our combined program resources toward the common objective of helping millions of people affected by the pandemic and subsequent economic downturn is imperative. And such efforts will assist in recouping job losses, a top priority of government at every level while cities, counties, states, and federal agencies struggle with diminished revenues and greater demands on resources and services that attend job losses.

We are committed to this endeavor. We propose to initially partner with a small group of willing states to pilot a combined workforce program initiative to help more households enter, re-enter, and remain in the workforce – with the assistance of whatever services they may need to achieve that goal, such as re-employment, training, and social supports. For some people, this could mean changing jobs, industry sectors or learning new skills. With a cross-agency focus, we will encourage our state partners to align and leverage the resources of their vital workforce programs at the state and local levels. Our state and local partners know best how to connect workers to the training and specific jobs needed for their labor markets. Our three agencies pledge to support this partnership through technical assistance, identification of potential funding sources, and coordination of our efforts.

Based on your State’s consistent commitment to workforce development and improving the lives of all families, we believe Arizona would be an excellent partner in this initiative. Any willing and committed state may participate in this initial group if they wish. To facilitate this effort, ACF has engaged Kristi Putnam, former Deputy Secretary of Kentucky’s Cabinet for Health and Family Services, to serve as the point of contact. Ms. Putnam will contact you to initiate an organizational meeting with you and members of your team either by electronic means or in-person, following applicable health and social-distancing guidelines.

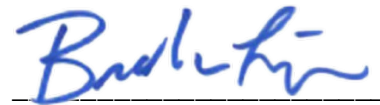
We stand ready to help and look forward to collaborating with you.



Lynn A. Johnson
Assistant Secretary,
Administration for
Children and Families



John Pallasch
Assistant Secretary for
Employment and Training, ETA



Brandon Lipps
Deputy Undersecretary for
Food, Nutrition and
Consumer Services

cc: President & CEO, State Chamber of Commerce