

# Pilot Profile: Minnesota

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Data Collaborative Pilot Initiative is a component of the TANF Data Innovation project. The 30-month pilot offered technical assistance and training to support cross-disciplinary teams of staff at eight state and county TANF programs in the routine use of TANF and other administrative data to inform policy and practice.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS.** Staff members from the TANF program in Olmsted and Dakota counties in southeastern Minnesota, in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), analyzed data about TANF benefit sanctions and the notices that agencies sent to participants who were at risk of receiving a sanction (that is, the withholding of aid or the termination of benefits). Notices of intent to sanction (NOITS) are sent to TANF participants to nudge them into following the program rules. The pilot team sought to better understand the relationship between NOITS rates and sanction rates and then to explore how NOITS and sanctions are associated with race, language, age, and immigration status. Sanctions cause real hardships to families, and past research has uncovered significant racial variation in women’s likelihood of experiencing sanctions. By focusing on these questions, the pilot sought to bring together insights from both state and county TANF agencies and build on recent efforts in Olmsted and Dakota counties to pilot new service delivery practices.



The Minnesota pilot team included a data scientist from the state data analytics unit and a mix of analytics and program staff in each county who were new users of R programming language.

**DATA LANDSCAPE.** The pilot team identified variables that state staff members extracted from DHS’s existing statewide data warehouse and then merged into a specially crafted data set for each county—the first time a Minnesota county had access to data organized in this way. The data originated from more than a dozen tables in the database. The data covered the period 2017 to 2021 and included variables at both the case level and the individual level for all TANF programs. Most of the key data within the warehouse originated with two state management information systems. One system is used by state and county workers to determine eligibility for public assistance and health care coverage, the



