

Work Participation Rate and Re-Engagement of Sanctioned CalWORKS Participants

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CalWORKs program in San Francisco County is committed to serving CalWORKs participants in a compassionate, effective and efficient manner. Many new initiatives and strategies are in place to assist staff, the program and the county to meet the work participation rate requirements dictated by state and federal regulations. The purpose of this case study is to explore innovative and creative strategies used in Alameda and Contra Costa counties to increase the Work Participation Rate (WPR) and re-engage sanctioned participants. It includes impor-

tant recommendations to San Francisco County to help comply with work participation and re-engagement requirements and avoid financial sanctions.

Both Alameda and Contra Costa counties have been testing and exploring new ways of engaging participants in WtW activities to increase their work participation rate. Having the opportunity to get together with other counties and discuss best practices and lessons learned is vital for the overall success of the entire state to comply with WPR requirements.

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Introduction

The CalWORKs program in San Francisco County is committed to serve CalWORKs participants in a compassionate, effective and efficient manner. Many new initiatives and strategies are in place to assist staff, the program and the county to meet the work participation rate requirements dictated by state and federal regulations. The purpose of this case study is to explore innovative and creative strategies used in Alameda and Contra Costa counties to increase the Work Participation Rate (WPR) and Re-engagement of Sanctioned Participants. Re-engaging sanctioned CalWORKs participants has become a high priority as sanctioned individuals are now counted in the WPR denominator. It is also intended to recommend ways for San Francisco County to comply with work participation requirements and avoid financial sanctions.

Background

The Welfare Reform: Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005 is legislation that reauthorized the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program of 1996. The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 requires states to engage more TANF cases in productive work activities leading to self-sufficiency.

Some of the provisions of the law that promote work and accountability include:

- Families receiving assistance in separate state programs, who were previously excluded from the participation rates, are now included.
- The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is required to issue regulations to ensure uniform and consistent measurement of work participation rates.

- States are required to establish and maintain work participation verification procedures reviewed by HHS and are subject to a new penalty of one to five percent of the CalWORKs Allocation for failure to establish or comply with these procedures.
- Determination of penalty—Counties have until 10/09 to meet the 50 and 90% WPR before facing financial sanctions.
- Caseload Reduction Credit—Work Participation Rate.

The WPR targets that states must meet to avoid fiscal penalties have not changed. They remain at 50 percent for all families (one parent) and 90 percent for two parent families. California has historically been successful in meeting the WPR because the Caseload Reduction Credit (CRC) greatly reduced the rate that California was required to meet. Effective in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2007, the DRA changed the base year for calculating the CRC from FFY 1995 to FFY 2005. This change requires the state to meet the WPR requirements without the benefit of the substantial caseload reductions achieved between FFY 1995 and FFY 2005, which ended September 30, 2005.

Findings

In my research in Alameda and Contra Costa counties, I learned that despite their differences, counties face many common issues in serving CalWORKs populations, including the challenge of re-engaging sanctioned participants. Some of the new strategies to engage sanctioned participants and to motivate timed-out populations to fully participate have not proven immediately successful, but with time and an

effective implementation, they can make a difference in re-engagement. Home visits have been successful in Alameda in re-engaging sanctioned participants. San Francisco has also used home visits in the pre-sanctioned process, and these home visits have proven to be more successful than any other type of contact.

Management and caseload management reports (MR) are not easily obtained from CalWIN. Most CalWIN counties are developing different reporting methods to enhance CalWIN MR based on CIS (County Information Server). CIS is the server that contains a copy of the CalWIN data, and counties pull the data from that server to create reports. The three counties included here are working diligently to develop effective and accurate management reports to help meet WPR requirements. San Francisco County contracted Exemplar Human Services in March, 2007. Exemplar provides management reports to counties from a CalWIN extract and also assists counties to target and evaluate strategies to increase participant's engagement. Alameda County is contracting with Exemplar as of July 1, 2007.

There could be a more effective sharing of best practices and lessons learned among counties at different levels to more effectively test and develop strategies and initiatives. All counties could benefit from the sharing of information. The Bay Area Work Group (BAWG) meets almost every month to discuss CalWORKs WtW issues. This work group is one of the appropriate vehicles for sharing information at the Program Analyst level.

ALAMEDA COUNTY

Alameda County's primary strategy is centered on establishing a stand-alone Employment Services Department (ESD) Department. Alameda believes that this will strengthen its ability to promote self-sufficiency and make progress towards meeting WPR goals. The newly created ES program is building upon lessons learned in the past ten years. There is an effort to re-engage key stakeholder groups in discussions focused on re-engineering the current system into one that is more navigable and responsive to the

needs of participants and workers. Creating the Employment Services Department is the foundational strategy in addressing the work participation rate issue. Full implementation of the County Plan Addendum is the on-going responsibility of ESD, and specific activities are being staged as the department moves from organizing itself to implementation of the plan. The newly created ES Department is also reviewing current practices and procedures and developing a new model for delivering services focused on Employment Services. Alameda is adding Employment Counselors and reducing caseloads. Employment Services staff will be thoroughly trained to obtain the skills and tools they need to effectively serve CalWORKs clients and help them achieve self-sufficiency. Alameda County is also expanding the use of incentives to increase participation at different bench marks. There are many other strategies under consideration or have been implemented in the county's effort to increase work participation.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

Contra Costa is refocusing efforts towards a more comprehensive system of workforce preparation. They started restructuring the Workforce Services Bureau in September of 2006.

Contra Costa has conducted the first round of Sanction Clinics. They are in the process of hiring Client Engagement Specialists (CES). The primary responsibility of these "outreach workers" will be making home visits to re-engage sanctioned participants. Another new position recently hired is Case Status Reviewer (CSR). The CSRs were assigned the responsibility to call sanctioned participants and invite them to attend the Sanction Clinics. Contra Costa has also instituted incentives vouchers. In May 2007, they also hired Pre-Employment Coaches (PEC) to update clients' resumes, conduct mock job interviews, coach participants on dressing for success, interviewing with confidence, following up after interviews, and using other strategies that lead to employment.

Contra Costa is partnering with the Adult School to develop a bridge program. The program will offer

two distinct modules—one module will cover essential workplace topics such as communication, interpersonal skills, decision-making skills, and lifelong learning, and the other module will be hands-on experiential activities targeting specific careers. These include office and health careers, basic computer skills, and career certifications in CPR, First Aid, Food Safety, Customer Service, and Custodial.

They have also contracted with Solutions West to provide targeted CalWIN Employment Services training to better prepare workers to provide services and to ensure correct data entry into CalWIN. They will improve the number and quality of WtW activities to help the county increase their WPR.

Contra Costa also plans to conduct a 100% Quality Assurance Review of all CalWORKs/WtW cases and to monitor them on-going.

Conclusions

- The three counties studied here (see summary table in the appendix) face similar challenges in meeting the WPR requirements. All see re-engaging sanctioned participants as an important part of this effort. The three counties vary demographically and outcomes to date also vary. See below:

County	09/06 WPR Population WtW 25 and 25A	Percentage Sanctioned Participants
Alameda	9095	5.6%
Contra Costa	3531	8.8%
San Francisco	2070	20.7%

It is not clear why San Francisco has a higher work participation rate and also a higher percentage of sanctioned participants. San Francisco's one worker model may have some impact on the outcome. However, San Francisco has changed to a two worker model as of March, 2007.

- San Francisco and all Bay Area counties are in need of more effective mechanisms to share and discuss best practices and lessons learned, work participation and re-engagement of sanctioned or non-participating participants. The sharing of information at different staff level within the

program and across counties is vital to increase WPR. All the counties can benefit from better information-sharing. The WPR across the state will improve if more is learned from one another and there are more opportunities to discuss strategies and initiatives.

- The development of caseload management tools and useful statistical reports are vital to increased work participation. The CalWIN system has not provided yet the needed management reports and caseload management tools that county staff need to provide services in an effective and efficient manner. These three counties are working diligently to find this essential piece to successfully improved WPR. Recently, CalWIN counties met in San Francisco to discuss WPR and related issues and, as a result of that meeting several counties took on assignments to have a common understanding of the WPR methodology and tool and share the findings of the assignments with the participating counties. San Francisco is moving forward to develop its own Case Separated Value (CSV) to automatically report WPR. It seemed that each county was developing its own way of working with the WPR piece and if information were shared, the end result would be a more consistent way of gathering statistics. This is a little complicated by the different ways IT services are administered at the county level.
- San Francisco County is innovative in delivering services. It has achieved a 34.1% WPR and constantly tests new strategies and initiatives to help it increase work participation. San Francisco is still below the required work participation rate, but is continuing to explore new ways of engaging and re-engaging participants.

Recommendations

- 1 The Bay Area Work Group (BAWG) holds a meeting almost every month to discuss CalWORKs issues. I recommend San Francisco actively engages the BAWG counties to ensure the monthly BAWG meeting is one of the effective

mechanisms or vehicles for all counties to share and discuss work participation rate, re-engagement of sanctioned participants and engagement of non-participating participants. This sharing of information would be at a Program Analyst and below level within programs.

Welfare to work best practices, strategies, initiatives and lessons learned should be discussed and shared in those meetings. The meetings must ensure that all counties benefit from the discussions and a combined pool of effort and work can assist counties in improving the work participation rate. All can benefit from knowing what other counties are implementing or testing to re-engage sanctioned and/or non-participating participants.

- 2 Use of “home visits” as the main component in the re-engagement of CalWORKs sanctioned participants (Sanction Outreach Initiative) is recommended. This is a new initiative that is expanding the existing Social Work Services Unit (SWSU) to reduce the number of both non-compliant and sanctioned participants. Two new social workers have joined the SWSU unit and will work in teams with Employment Specialists to provide extra support to re-engage participants through phone calls and home visits. This initiative will help San Francisco in effectively re-engaging sanctioned participants.

Home visits have made a difference in Alameda’s work participation rate. Many sanctioned families can be re-engaged or directed in the right direction when a home visit is conducted.

- 3 Have newly staff hired as Employment Services Quality Assurance specialists not only to improve processes and monitor adherence to the goals of W & I Code 10540 but to also support, coach and train WtW specialists in the following areas:

- CalWIN Employment Services entries
- WtW regulations, policy and procedures

Quality Assurance specialists can also conduct case reviews to ensure correctness as well as analyze data collected to highlight training needs, and provide “one on one” training and coaching if needed.

- 4 Program should ensure that useful caseload management tools and reports are available for staff to provide services more effectively and accurately. Staff should closely monitor participation to be able to increase the work participation rate for the county using the tools and resources provided by the program. Staff also to have the appropriate data regarding sanctioned participants to plan and take action on re-engagement strategies and bring sanctioned participants back to full participation.

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APPENDIX
Summary Chart

Counties	09/06 WPR	Challenges	New Strategies
Alameda	13.68%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Caseloads (125 per worker). 2 worker model. • Lack of accurate and effective CalWIN management reports and case management tools. • Improve support and resources for staff to deliver services more efficiently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a Separate Employment Services Department • Increasing the number of Employment Counselors. • Convening an Advisory Committee. • Developing stronger relationships with agencies in the community. • Hosting Employment One Day Fairs to invite sanctioned clients. • Quarterly mailings to Sanctioned clients.
Contra Costa	21%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Caseloads (96 per worker). 2 worker model. • Lack of accurate and effective CalWIN management reports and case management tools. • Improve support and resources for staff to deliver services more efficiently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructuring the Workforce Services Bureau. • New Staff to work in Sanction Clinics Project—CSRs and CESSs. CSRs already on board contacting sanctioned clients. • Instituting incentives vouchers. • Hired Pre-Employment Coaches (PEC) who update resumes, conduct mock interviews and other job interview functions. • Plan to implement the Adult Bridging Program in 9/07. • 100% Quality Assurance Reviews. • Increase number and improve quality of WtW activities. • Use Social Workers in Job Club activities to assist in removing participants' barriers.
San Francisco	34.1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Caseloads (60 per worker). 1 worker model. Transitioned in March, 2007 to a 2 worker model. • Lack of accurate and effective CalWIN management reports and case management tools. • Improve support and resources for staff to deliver services more efficiently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program reorganization to separate the functions of eligibility (E&E) and employment (WtW). • Training for the WtWSpecialists. • Newly-hired two Employment Services Quality Assurance Specialists review casework and support, coach and train WtW staff. • New Sanctioned Outreach/Re-engagement initiative. • Increase capacity and variety of WtW activities (Work Study, OJT, VTR and subsidized work programs) • Restructure some activities.

