

Beyond the Numbers: Enhancing Experiences, Efficiency and Performance in Santa Clara County’s Subsidized Employment Program, Employment Connection Works

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013, California State Assembly Bill 74 included provisions to provide additional aid and services to CalWORKs families facing acute crisis. Among the provisions was a new funding stream to expand existing subsidized employment programs.

Santa Clara County was among the first counties to create an Expanded Subsidized Employment Program, known as Employment Connection Works (EC Works). As the program progressed, it has successfully achieved the performance goals that met the quantitative measures identified by the state.

Administering the EC Works Program has come with several systemic challenges that are

inherent with operating a program of its size and complexity. In the following case study Santa Clara County looks toward San Francisco County’s JOBSNOW! subsidized employment program to study its infrastructure, compare program efficiencies, and glean fitting practices to improve the qualitative aspects of the EC Works Program. Implementing the series of recommendations generated from the study would improve the program’s user friendliness for staff, employers, and clients alike—achieving program success beyond traditional performance measures.

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Employment Connection Works, The Inception

Since 2009, Santa Clara County has administered Transitional Subsidized Employment, a subsidized employment program geared toward families with limited work skills and experience. The program, funded through Assembly Bill 98, targeted a select population of clients in the CalWORKs program that required additional assistance in finding employment and developing skills to enter the workforce. In 2013, the State of California adopted Assembly Bill 74 enacting several bold strategic measures aimed at supporting distressed CalWORKs families and increasing county and state Work Participation Rates. Among these measures was a new funding stream made available to increase the scope and size of existing subsidized employment programs, appropriately named, Expanded Subsidized Employment (ESE).

Santa Clara County was among a select few that were awarded first-year funding and the Employment Connection Works (EC Works) subsidized employment program was developed. EC Works rapidly evolved into a multi-tier service model, designed to serve a diverse array of clients with varied employment skills and work experience.

Benchmarking Performance

With the new funding allocation, the state established performance deliverables to measure the health

of each county's ESE program. The program performance goals were straightforward and designed to shepherd participating counties toward meeting the stated goals of the enacted Assembly Bill. The four measures by which performance is assessed are:

- Number of Clients Placed in Subsidized Employment
- Earnings Before Subsidized Employment
- Earnings After Subsidized Employment
- Subsidized Employment Effect on WPR

EC Works, By the Numbers

EC Works is painting an early portrait of success, meeting or exceeding the performance standards that were established in the Program Plan submitted to the state. Through the first two years of the program, over 300 clients were placed into subsidized employment. Calculating client earnings before and after the subsidy determined that post-placement earnings were up 129%, with clients earning an average of \$909 more per month from when they were only receiving a CalWORKs grant.

Beyond the Numbers

To date, Santa Clara County's measured success rates serve as a positive indicator of the program's effectiveness in engaging clients in employment and ushering them into a life of self-sufficiency.

Subsidized employment programs are, however, inherently complex, and client success only accounts for one measure of the program's design. Santa Clara County has encountered a number of challenges that have inspired a closer examination of efficiency and areas of potential improvements in EC Works.

Opportunities to Explore

The County of San Francisco administers a robust subsidized employment program, JOBSNOW!, which operates under similar principles but has matched local funding that allows the program to serve a much broader client base. This client base includes job seekers from city-based programs with target based service populations (e.g., youth involved in gang violence) and county social programs like General Assistance, former foster youth, and participants in the CalWORKs program. Serving a large and diverse population has created an atmosphere in which innovation and proficiency are key ingredients to meeting programmatic challenges.

The JOBSNOW! program was born out of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 and the program has been enhanced through funding provided through the CalWORKs allocations in Assembly Bill 98 and Assembly Bill 74. In its current adaptation, the program features three tiers, including sub-tiers with refined eligibility requirements to serve very specific program populations. Since its inception the program has placed an impressive 13,290 participants into employment.

Tier 1, the Community Jobs Program (CJP), offers 6-month job placements to clients with limited work experience and extensive employment barriers. San Francisco County contracts with community based organizations to provide supportive services and placements within non-profit organizations. Through the short-term placement, participants develop work skills and experience that are crucial to finding employment and retaining a job after they're hired. The program mutually benefits participating agencies, as the wages issued are 100% subsidized by the county.

Within the Community Jobs Program resides a sub-program, which specializes in serving CalWORKs clients that were selected as part of the county's Work Participation Rate sample. Clients selected in the sample may participate in 1-2 month job placements within a community organization and all wages are subsidized. The program has proven to be a successful contributor to the county's WPR rate.

Tier 2 is a combination of two programs aimed at serving participants with intermediate level work skills and experience; the Public Service Trainee (PST) program and Individualized Training Internship Program (ITIP). By participating in either program, participants have an avenue to receive on-the-job training, development of soft work skills, and have a direct path to transition into unsubsidized employment.

PST provides a six-month training opportunity in which clients are placed directly under the supervision of a county or city department. During their training, participants will work for 32 hours each week at a rate of \$13.77 an hour. The Human Services Agency is the employer of record for these positions and maintains the clients' payroll and Human Resources responsibilities. PST clients have multiple options for employment, ranging from entry-mid level office positions in clerical or customer service to blue collar positions like street cleaning and building maintenance. For many, these jobs represent a foot through the door to public employment.

ITIP operates in a similar fashion as Tier 1's CJP program, yet, distinguishes itself by offering increased hours and the agency clients work for is their employer of record. Participants in ITIP take part in a 6-month paid internship with a local non-profit agency. During this timeframe the client will work 32-hours each week while developing his or her work skills. These positions pay \$11.05 per hour and since the agency clients are placed with is their employer of record, the odds of being retained as a permanent employee are increased. The clients' full wages are reimbursed for the 6-month

period and many are offered a job at the end of the internship period.

Tier 3, the Wage Subsidy Program provides job opportunities to work-ready participants with marketable job skills or work history. The program is marketed toward private sector employers and offers five months work and up to \$5,000 in financial incentives for hiring participants.

Common Vision, Distinct Methodologies

Structurally, the Subsidized Employment programs in both San Francisco and Santa Clara Counties share some commonalities. Both programs adopted a tiered approach to serve clients with varying skill and experience levels, and they both look to community based partners, public agencies, and local employers to develop long-term work solutions.

San Francisco County has employed some very unique procedures and tools to limit bureaucracy and streamline the program for its users. The 15-day case study presented an opportunity to analyze these procedural techniques and tools and potentially glean and implement them to ease some of the challenges that have arisen during the execution of EC Works.

Electronic Contracting and Signatures

JOBsNOW! utilizes an electronic contract management technology developed and maintained by vendor, DocuSign. The DocuSign web-based software package allows the county to administer its employer applications process completely online, including all signatory approvals.

DocuSign has worked in conjunction with the county to create a unique JOBsNOW! employer application template that is uploaded online. The template contains the application information, a series of “yes or no” checkboxes that the user utilizes to indicate that he or she agrees with terms, and a series of agreement requirements. Most importantly, the document possesses the ability for a user to add a legally binding electronic signature.

Through the sequential signature process, each user that is required to approve the application is

notified via email that he or she has a document ready for review and approval. The user will log into the software online and have immediate access to the documents. As the application is approved, the approver may electronically submit it to the next authority until the Executive Director applies a final electronic signature.

With an extensive vetting process prior to new employer participation, DocuSign has greatly expedited the time required and streamlined the approval and authorization process for the county. Use of the technology was heavily praised by program management and supported by the county’s Business Account Representatives that are responsible for recruiting new employers.

Santa Clara County is currently utilizing a traditional contracting agreement that requires a wet signature. At present time, Delegation of Authority has been extended to the overseeing Program Manager to expedite the signatory process; however, the process still requires a “hand-to-hand” pass between approvers and two support staff to scan and distribute electronic copies of the contract to required departments, which may take up to three weeks.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Santa Clara County adopt and acquire the use of DocuSign technology to manage its EC Works employer contracting process.

Automating the contracting process would present significant benefits, including: seamless transition between reviewers and approvers, a reduction in the time required to sign a new contract agreement, elimination of the need to scan and distribute copies, and a reduction in dedicated staff to manage the contracting process.

Additionally, DocuSign’s proprietary electronic signature technology is presently the only electronic signatory technology approved for use by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.

The software represents an opportunity to streamline the contracting process with minimal financial investment. Software licensing is available at a rate of \$30 per month, per user, with a 12-month

obligation and one time start-up fee of \$54. DocuSign also offers a 25% discount for government agencies, bringing the total cost per user to \$270 per year.

Santa Clara County will require 11 licenses, combined with a 20-hour technical support package; the overall cost of implementation will be \$9,315 per year. With the fiscal year-end approaching, it's recommended that unused funding in the FY '14-15 state CalWORKs allocation be utilized to acquire the needed licensing.

Regional Job Development

San Francisco County has increased its efforts to combine services to offer wraparound support to its families. JOBSNOW! is actively working with families that are relocating to more affordable areas through the use of CalWORKs Stabilization Services.

Self-sustaining employment will be a key factor in allowing these families to maintain long-term housing once they are settled. Job Developers have been actively recruiting new employers in targeted regions near areas of affordable housing that families are migrating to. JOBSNOW! grants clients a foot in the door with nearby employers they may previously have had no access to and living closer to work will reduce the costs associated with commuting to and from further, more centralized places of employment.

Santa Clara County is experiencing similar housing trends. As the job market rebounded past the recession, rental rates experienced a rapid increase while the vacancy rate has shrunk to a scarce 1%. With growing competition for the few available rentals, families have been relocating to smaller cities on the outskirts of the county with fewer local job opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that EC's in the Employer Relations Unit begin developing subsidized employment positions in areas in which families are able to relocate to through CalWORKs Housing grants and CalWORKs Stabilization Services.

Through Santa Clara County's partner housing agency, Abode Family Services, EC Works can obtain demographic data to locate areas of concentrated rehousing. By marketing the program in concentrated areas, the county can ensure seamless integration of employment into its stabilization plans. With viable work opportunities closer to home, the county will be able to optimize the financial investment in families served and increase the likelihood of long-term sustainment.

Regional Meetings

The 15-day project presented a fruitful opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from the team administering the subsidized employment program in San Francisco. In meeting with different staff members, questions on program rules and processes were posed of both programs. In each instance, the questions inspired in-depth discussions on resolving program issues, which inspired shared understanding on both sides and potential to implement new strategies. The exchange proved to be mutually beneficial to both programs.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Santa Clara County take the lead on hosting and maintaining a regional meeting for counties administering, or engaged in developing, a subsidized employment program. Meeting invites should be extended to all levels of program staff.

A semi-annual meeting would extend the opportunity for counties to provide insight into their program operations and offer a venue for exploring new subsidized employment programs and collaboratively resolving challenging issues. It would also offer an opportunity to develop a regional business recruitment strategy to larger employers and potentially share access to these employers. Additionally, any counties in the development stage would have access to working models that would allow them to examine various infrastructure and processes prior to implementing their own programs.

Good to Great

Adopting these three program enhancements would take the EC Works program from admirably meeting base performance goals to achieving a new level of service by honing the intangible elements of the program: user friendliness, procedural efficiency, and comprehensive customer care.

Santa Clara County has built a reputation as a model county for achieving program goals and optimizing program services. Utilizing innovative technology, streamlining processes, and collaborating with partner agencies will certainly help elevate EC Works from good to great, going beyond the numbers to enrich the experience of all involved in the program.

Acknowledgments

Contributions to this project were numerous and plentiful. On behalf of Santa Clara County and myself, I would like to express my gratitude to my gracious hosts in San Francisco County who provided both their support and insight during my exchange project:

John Murray, BASSC Liaison and Sr. Planning Analyst; Jim Whelly, Deputy Director of Workforce Development; Eli Asenloo, Unit Supervisor Workforce Development Division; Viktoriya Dostal, Unit Supervisor Workforce Development Division; David Curto, Director of Contracts and Facilities; Christina Iwasaki, Senior Contract Manager; and Tony Lugo, Director of Welfare to Work Services.

