

Creating Equitable Access to Good Jobs by Connecting CalWORKs Recipients to WIOA Resources

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Job seekers and employers cross county lines for training and employment. The Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County (WDBCCC) and Alameda County Workforce Development Board (ACWDB) offer various services to help job seekers looking for employment and career opportunities. To achieve equity, the 2021-2024 WDBCCC Local Plan calls for partner collaboration through co-enrollment strategies to leverage the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) resources to support participants with barriers to employment and for system integration.

This study reviews Alameda County Social Services Agency's (ACSSA) California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to

Kids (CalWORKs) job search and placement activities through a contracted provider, Rubicon Programs. Rubicon Programs received state and federal recognition for best practices in WIOA and CalWORKs co-enrollment strategies in 2015. Data reviewed for this study reinforced that these 2015 strategies are still the best practices for optimizing co-enrollment and system integration in both programs. This study will highlight other WIOA strategies to improve CalWORKs recipients' placement in good jobs, including career exploration and assessment, career pathways with suitable employment, and labor market information. Recommendations are offered based on assessing the effectiveness and relevance for Contra Costa of the strategies studied.

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Introduction

According to the California Workforce Board Policy Brief of November 1, 2016:

Strong partnerships with the local workforce development board can allow for the mixture of WIOA and Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) funds to create a comprehensive set of services for young parents entering a Career Pathway. Moreover, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, most TANF recipients receive assistance for less than a year at a time. This information would imply that career pathways should be developed to allow CalWORKs participants to move through the path without starting over each time they start or stop receiving CalWORKs cash assistance. WIOA partners should work together continually to determine the best strategy at the regional and local level that allows funds and resources to be used in more flexible, coordinated, and sustainable ways, which is vital to the success of Career Pathway programs for CalWORKs participants.

On March 25, 2022, the House Education and Labor Committee released a discussion draft bill to reauthorize WIOA 2022 for six years. The Committee began work on the legislation that funds the Department of Labor's workforce development programs. This reauthorization builds on the core provisions of Title I of WIOA, increases authorization levels, and makes improvements to strengthen the nation's workforce development system. The draft bill encourages the workforce system to serve all job seekers equitably and promote high-quality jobs. The passage of WIOA in 2014, which expired in 2020, supersedes the Workforce Invest Act (WIA) of 1998. The

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), reauthorized in 2014, calls for aligning programs and services between TANF and WIOA public workforce development system.

The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program is California's version of the federal TANF program. CalWORKs provides temporary cash assistance to meet basic family needs. It also provides education, employment, and training programs to assist the family's move toward self-sufficiency. Components of CalWORKs include time limits on eligibility, work requirements, supportive services to encourage program participation and parental responsibility. The program serves all 58 counties in the state and is operated locally by county welfare departments.

Contra Costa Works (CCWORKS), a component of the CalWORKs/Welfare to Work program, is an employment program that is highly successful and provides employment training, subsidized work experience, childcare, and supportive services for CalWORKs jobseekers. CCWORKS provides a substantial wage subsidy to employers who hire eligible job seekers for full or part-time positions throughout Contra Costa County. Participating CCWORKS employers may receive wage subsidies equal to California state minimum wage.

In 2016, the Workforce Services Bureau (WFS) of the Contra Costa County – Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) collaborated with The Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County (WDBCCC) to "lift and shift" the employment and placement of

CalWORKs Welfare to Work through an inter-agency agreement. The lift and shift allowed the bureau to leverage the resources and expertise of the WDBCCC business services team in employer engagement for subsidized or unsubsidized employment. The program includes three employment placement counselors and clerical staff managed by a workforce services specialist who reports to the Administrator. The data gathered from the CALJOBS from July 1, 2020 – to June 30, 2021, indicates that only 2.5% of TANF clients in Contra Costa County are co-enrolled with WIOA services.

Background

"Equity is fairness and justice achieved through systematically assessing disparities in representation, opportunities, and outcomes and eliminating disparities through targeted actions focused on structural, systemic and programmatic changes."

- Junious Williams, adapted from Urban Strategies

Alameda County, located in the East Bay, is California's seventh-largest County. The County employs 9,000 full-time employees and operates on an annual budget of \$3.61 billion. 1.6 million people call Alameda County home. As a major urban county, Alameda provides a full range of services to its citizens. The Alameda County Social Services Agency (ACSSA) is comprised of several departments: Agency Administration; Adult & Aging Services; Children & Family Services; Government & Community Relations; and the Workforce & Benefits Administration (WBA). The CalWORKs program is under the WBA, whose mission is to promote the economic and social well-being of individuals, families, neighborhoods, and communities.

Alameda County Workforce Development Board (ACWDB) is under the Government & Community Relations Department. It funds Rubicon Programs as the Operator of the Comprehensive American Job Center (AJCC) and Career Services for WIOA, making Rubicon Programs a unique model for co-enrollment with WIOA and CalWORKs co-located.

Effective July 1, 2014, the WBA of Alameda County Social Services Agency partnered with new providers for the Career & Employment Centers. The new service providers were Rubicon Programs, Inc. and Lao Family Community Development, Inc., to cover the three regions.

According to the California Employment Development Department's monthly Labor Force Data, the unemployment rate in Alameda County as of March 2022 is at 3.2 %, compared to the state at 4.2%.

Reason for this Study

Contra Costa Employment and Human Services (EHSD) mission statement is to partner with the community to deliver quality services to ensure access to resources that support, protect, and empower individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency. In achieving equity, the 2021-2024 WDBCCC Local Plan calls for partner collaboration through co-enrollment strategies to leverage the WIOA resources to support participants with barriers to employment and for system integration. This study reviewed the Alameda County CalWORKs Program to learn about their co-enrollment best practices to create equitable access to WIOA resources for CalWORKs participants.

The Alameda County Rubicon Programs received recognition from the California Workforce Association (CWA) and The National TANF Directors Meeting for their

strategies to leverage WIOA services to support CalWORKs recipients. They presented to these associations at the National TANF Directors Conference in Virginia in 2017, where the workshop topic was Real-World Strategies for Improving TANF/WIOA. They showed how WIOA provides TANF programs with increased opportunities to link participants to the workforce. They also highlighted key findings from the field and worked with attendees to better understand how to integrate similar approaches locally. The CWA conference was on the same topic in Southern California. Interviews for this study included staff of Rubicon Programs, Lao Family Community Development, Inc. (LFCD), and other program managers. Online research was also conducted to validate that these strategies are still effective.

In recent years, reduced CalWORKs program funding affected staffing levels, resulting in decreased co-enrollment. This decrease further proves that these co-enrollment strategies would remain successful with the intentional staffing of the program. The COVID-19 pandemic and related challenges of shelter in place, remote work, and return to office also affected outcomes, and fewer people were seeking employment during the past few years.

With the business community and services slowly returning to offices and adapting to virtual learning and flexible work schedules, this model should still be relevant.

The language below from the contract for Career and Employment Center (CEC) Services (2020) requires the providers to ensure alignment with WIOA and EASTBAY WORKS NETWORK (aka CALJOBS Database):

- **Job Club/Job Search:** The Contractor will be responsible for providing an

open/entry, open/exit daily Job Club and Job Search program, offering up to four (4) weeks of employment related services and structured activities as stated below:

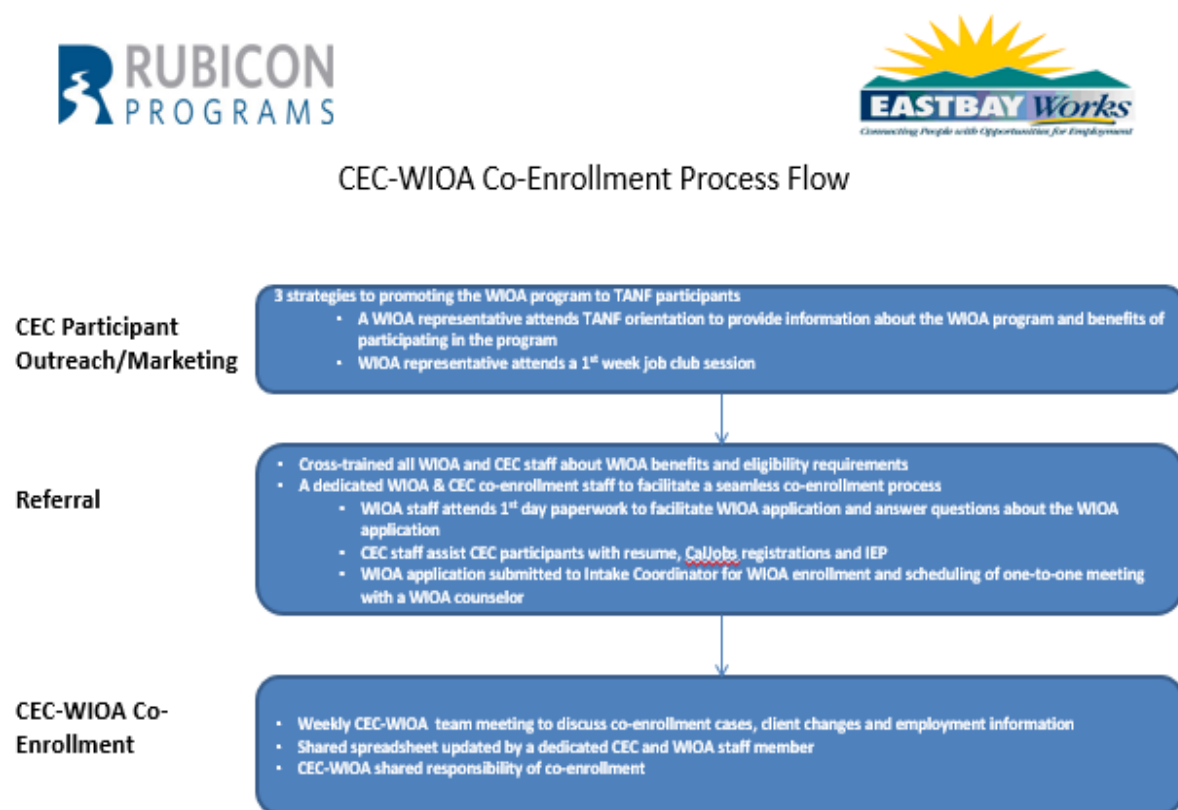
- Ensure that all participants are provided with a structured training program on the usage of the EASTBAY Works online system. This includes registering and using the system to find employment opportunities, exploring the local labor market to learn about the different types of career and occupational options available to job seekers, and becoming knowledgeable about the local educational and training programs within Alameda County.
- Collaborate with the Alameda County EASTBAY Works network to identify programmatic service linkages and resource sharing opportunities whereby participants will have opportunities as needed to access services at the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) funded One Stop Career Center. Such services can include, but are not limited to Universal, Basic and Individualized Services.
- **Employer Engagement:** The Contractor will identify and cultivate employment opportunities and ongoing relationships with a wide range of employers with a special focus on identifying and cultivating employment opportunities to help program participants find and keep work while meeting the hiring needs of employers in the competitive labor market.

- o The Contractor will encourage employers to utilize the EASTBAY Works online system and network for their recruitment and employment needs.
- **Additional Requirements**
 - o The Contractor will partner with the EASTBAY Works network to

identify service linkages and resource sharing opportunities in the areas of training, education and job placement.

Please see Figure 1 for the process flow developed by Rubicon Programs, which describes the CEC-WIOA co-enrollment process.

Figure 1: CEC-WIOA Co-Enrollment Process Flow



Source: https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/uploaded_files/MQuinnineRealWorldStrategies-_ColorFixed-md_cn10txqf-md-QF_jw.pdf

CEC-WIOA Data and Outcomes from Rubicon Programs for program years 2015-2017 are shown below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Data and Outcomes for program years 2015-2017

Program Year 15-16		
CEC Enrollments		221
Job Club Completions		154
Incomplete JCL ppts		67
Co-Enrolled into WIOA		67
<i>Basic</i>		38
<i>Individual</i>		29
Training		1
Supportive Services		5
Employment		26
Avg Starting Wage		\$13.18
Total % Co-Enrolled	30%	67 of 221
Co-Enrolled Basic	57%	38 of 67
Co-Enrolled Individual	43%	29 of 67
Individual level w/Training	3%	1 of 29
Individual level w/Supportive Services	17%	5 of 29
Total Exits	100%	67 of 67
Total Exits with Employment	39%	26 of 67
Individual level Exits with Employment	90%	26 of 29

Program Year 16-17		
CEC Enrollments		170
Job Club Completions		122
Incomplete JCL ppts		48
Co-Enrolled into WIOA		65
<i>Basic</i>		20
<i>Individual</i>		45
Training		1
Supportive Services		1
Employment		27
Avg Starting Wage		\$14.43
Total % Co-Enrolled	38%	65 of 170
Co-Enrolled Basic	31%	20 of 65
Co-Enrolled Individual	69%	45 of 65
Individual level w/Training	2%	1 of 45
Individual level w/Supportive Services	0%	0 of 45
Total Exits	65%	42 of 65
Total Exits with Employment	42%	27 of 65
Individual level Exits with Employment	60%	27 of 45

Source:

https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/uploaded_files/MQuinnineRealWorldStrategies_ColorFixed-md_cn10txqf-md-QF_jw.pdf

The following excerpt from Rubicon Programs (Ngo & Quinnine, n.d) outlines co-enrollment strategies:

Rubicon Programs Co-enrollment Strategies Incorporated

- Physical co-location of TANF and WIOA services
- Shared job search resource rooms
- Cross-training staff on policy
- Assessments conducted in one system are shared with case managers in the other

- Team case management
- Dedicated WIOA & CEC Staff member
- Braided funding stream
- Co-enrolling TANF recipients as WIOA participants
- Tracking WIOA performance measure outcome for TANF recipients

The excerpts from “Resources for Connecting TANF Recipients and Other Low-Income Families to Good Jobs” (Joyce, et al., 2015) below highlight strategies to support TANF recipients.

1. Career exploration and assessment:

Career exploration tools can be used to learn about occupations and industries and the skills, abilities, and credentials required to enter them. In addition, they can help in locating training and education programs related to a person's career interests...The use of career exploration and assessment tools is especially important in TANF programs. This is because education and training resources for TANF recipients are limited, and TANF rules restrict the amount of time spent on education and training activities that can count toward the work participation rate. Using these tools can help ensure limited funding resources are well invested (p. 5)

2. Career pathways and sector strategies:

A sector strategy is a workforce development approach that targets the needs of a specific industry sector and may involve the collaboration of education and training providers, businesses, community organizations, state agencies, and others...Career pathways initiatives and sector strategies can help TANF recipients, and other low-income families obtain good jobs and advance in careers in in-demand industries (p. 6)

3. Labor market information (LMI):

LMI can help TANF administrators and frontline staff

identify available jobs with growth potential and self-sufficient wages. As with career exploration and assessment tools, using LMI in TANF programs is especially important due to limits on training resources and the time spent on education and training activities that can count toward the work participation rate (p. 7)

Recommendations for Contra Costa County

- Cross-train Employment Placement Counselors (EPCs) on WIOA programs and services, including career exploration and assessment, career pathways and sector strategies, and labor market information (LMI).
- Arrange for EPCs to attend CalWORKs intake orientation to create awareness and access to WIOA resources as a supplemental choice to their CalWORKs benefits.
- System Alignment to encourage clients to register on CalJOBS. Employers could find resumes on CalJOBS, and staff could track WIOA performance measure outcomes for TANF recipients and co-enroll TANF recipients as WIOA participants.
- Active participation in Business Services Team Events and Integrated Business Services and Employment Team (IBEST) meetings would allow direct collaboration with business staff from Employment Development Department and Rubicon Programs.

- EPCs to attend the WDBCCC Business and Economic Development (BED) Committee meetings and hear from employers, city economic development managers, labor market and government experts, community-based organizations (CBOs), and small business resource providers. These discussions focused on business attraction, retention, downsizing, jobs for the future, skills gaps, grant opportunities, sector strategies, employer forums, education, and support for job seekers with barriers to employment.
- Establish a warm handoff process for transition to the AJCC staff at the end of the CCWORKS program to support unemployed clients who need further support, such as training to be self-sufficient and attain a good job.

These recommendations do not have any fiscal impact. The current intra-agency agreement with WDBCCC and WFS program aims to place clients in subsidized and unsubsidized employment, leveraging the WDBCCC's robust employer base and collaboration. The five Priority Industry Sectors identified by WDBCCC as suitable for good jobs are Healthcare, Advanced Manufacturing, Information Computer Technology, Energy, and Construction.

Implementing these strategies would ensure equitable access to resources and improve career pathways.

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