

FOCUSING ON COMMUNITY SERVICES: SONOMAWORKS

Fernando Valcarcel*

INTRODUCTION

Santa Clara County Social Services Agency will for the first time contract out Ca1WORKs Community Services Component. For many years the agency has operated similar programs such as GAIN'S PREP Work Experience and General Assistance's work assignments and JTPA's SPEDY programs with in-house resources. The lessons learned by both staff and the provider community in Sonoma County would likely prove valuable to Santa Clara County's "Fresh Start" Community Service program. Sonoma County has been contracting out these types of services for over seventeen years. This case study will focus on the Community Services program.

BACKGROUND

Sonoma County is a beautiful county. Its rolling hills and agricultural fields support a healthy wine industry, farming of dairy products and fancy vegetables and tourism industry. Some high technology companies have also set up shop in Sonoma County. Ori1ly & Associates affiliated with NOLO Press publishers of "How to" technology books employ over 6,800 people. Hewlett Packard has a division in the county along with other telecommunication and Internet companies. Current unemployment rate is around 2.6% and housing costs are expensive compared to salaries.

Since 1970 the county has experience a population increase of 103% to what is now a population of around 417,000¹. The county has nine major cities ranging in population form 46, 000 in Petaluma to the largest of around 123,000 in Santa Rosa. Unincorporated areas account for 32% of the population or about 153,000'. The county has a small minority community of only 17.1 % as represented below²:

Ethnicity	% of Population
Caucasian	82.9
Hispanic	11.8
Asian	2.9 .
African America	1.5
Native America	.9
t Including pacific islanders	

The county has two major junior colleges and a strong community based organization (CBO) community. Serving customers in remote areas is one of the continued challenges facing Sonoma County. The county has many rural parts and all customers can not be served by One-stop-centers. Some areas such as Bodega Bay have as few as 50 to 100 customers.

* Fernando Valcarcel is Employment Services Program Manager in the Department of Employment and Benefit Services at the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency.

¹ Economic data 1994, Sonoma County

² World Wide Web address: www.sonoma-county.org

PROGRAM DESIGN

The CalWORKs program in Sonoma County is called SonomaWORKs. It is administered by the Sonoma County Human Services Department's Employment and Training Division. Upon application to SonomaWORKs, customers attend an intake orientation to SonomaWORKs as well as an appraisal of their current situation, including their employment status. If customer is unemployed and appropriate for employment Services, they are referred to a component to enable the customer to find employment. This Initial Job Search is a six-week opportunity for the job seeker to have guidance and support in finding unsubsidized employment.

If, after the Initial Job Search component, a customer is still unemployed or underemployed, they are referred to an Assessment, where County staff and customer develop a Welfare-to-Work (W2W) plan. As part of the W2W a customer may be referred to employment services such as Post-Assessment Job Search, On-The-Job Training, or Work Experience/Community Services. On-The-Job Training can be either SonomaWORKs Grant Based OJT or JTPA funded OJT.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The ultimate goal of SonomaWORKs is to enable customers to find employment sufficient to meet their basic needs of housing, food, child care, transportation, clothing and related work expenses, without any subsidies or public assistance.

Each component under SonomaWORKs has expected outcomes that are geared to assisting customers in meeting the ultimate goal. Performance outcomes are detailed as follows:

- Initial Job Search - 50% of enrollees are expected to have unsubsidized employment within 30 days after completion of component
- Post-Assessment Job Search - 75% of enrollees are expected to have unsubsidized employment within 30 days after completion of component
- OJT - 70% of enrollees into work-sites within 30 days of enrollment into the component and 80% of those into unsubsidized employment within 30 days after completion of component
- Work Experience/Community Services - 90% of enrollees into work-sites within 30 days of enrollment into the component and 45% of those into unsubsidized employment within 30 days after completion of component with a 70% retention rate at six months

WORK EXPERIENCE/COMMUNITY SERVICES

Work Experience and Community Services have been combined into one component with one exception. Customers in a Work Experience component may be placed in private-for-profit work-sites but Community Services customers are limited to public and non-profit work-sites.

The purpose of Work Experience/Community Services is to acquire transferable job specific skills while developing good work habits and work maturity skills. Work Experience/Community Services also provides customers with opportunity to meet work participation requirements while contributing valuable services to their local communities. Work assignment hours of participation are calculated based on the customer's TANF grant divided by the State's current minimum wage. The balance of hours needed to meet the 32 or 35 required hours of participation are met using concurrent work activities including a mandatory six hours of job search. Work Experience/Community Services providers are responsible for intake of individuals referred from the county. They develop work-sites, refer and place customers. They provide training, support and supervision for work-site supervisors to ensure that customers are involved in activities that significantly enhance their employability. Additionally, they provide Life Skills workshops that include topics such as Conflict Resolution, Budgeting and Retention to assist customers in being successful on the job. The mandatory six hours of structured job search helps transition customers into unsubsidized employment. Contractors also provide job development and retention services.

Work Experience/Community Services is designed to be a "Valued Added" component that takes the customer's needs into consideration to make a successful match. Customers who are unable to participate in the traditional SonomaWORKs activities due to their remote location take advantage of this component to develop work skills and transition into unsubsidized employment. Those who have met their 18 or 24 month time limits and have not been able to find work and need to continue to receive their TANF benefits are mandatory referrals to Community Services. Even for this group assignments are based on their needs and what is likely to help them transition to employment.

PROVIDERS

Since 1996, The Employment Group (TEG), a four-agency consortium serving as the primary SonomaWORKs employment and training provider has delivered an array of employment and training services under contract with the County of Sonoma Human Services Department. The four agencies comprising the consortium are Circuit Rider Productions (serving North County), Goodwill Industries of the Redwood Empire, Inc. (designated as the lead agency and serving the Central County), Petaluma People Services Center (serving the South County), and West County Community Services (serving West County). For post employment and community services The Employment Group has a sub contract with Sonoma County Associates for Youth Development (SCAYD) to services the Cotati/Rohnert Park geographical area.

The Consortium's management structure is comprised of the TEG Council consisting of representatives from all member agencies. The TEG Council is charged with the primary responsibility of coordinating program activities, insuring program quality and fiscal integrity, and mediating any disagreements between consortium members. The Council makes binding decisions regarding program design and implementation. When consensus can not be reached, each agency representative has one vote with majority rule. In case of a tie vote, Goodwill Industries, as the lead agency, has the final decision.

The Consortium along with County staff developed an internal, automated data collection and reporting system to track and report on program and financial information. County staff and TEG staff also meet monthly to discuss any issues that need attention and to continue the process of implementation. Some procedures and guidelines were not available at program startup. The monthly meetings are an effective way of continually improving program process and expediting resolution to other issues that may come up.

WHY CONTRACT OUT SERVICES

Sonoma County has contracting employment services for many years. The Board of Supervisors and staff see it as a way to return funds to the community. A strong service delivery system that is not so insular is in the best interest of the customers and the community³. Funding partners allows them to leverage other funding to offset overhead costs and stretch the direct services dollar. Collaborative efforts have proven to be more efficient and able to deliver services at any location, especially in remote areas of the county. Contracting services also assist the county in supporting One-Stop-Centers as mandated by Federal law. The question is not one sided, there are strong reason for delivering services with in house resources. When Sonoma County considered all their options contracting services was the clear choice for them. Listed below are some of reasons used in arriving at their decision.

Pros to contracting out services	Cons to contracting out services
Cheaper staffing costs	High staff turnover due to lower wages
More flexibility for partners to conduct fund raising	County has less direct control over program
Partners have more flexibility in staffing evening and weekend services	
More partners means more checks and balances in program administration and delivery of services	
Funding a single group allows for economy of scale. Less dollars are needed for overhead costs and more is available for program services	

POSSIBLE APPLICATION IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

The use of JTPA OJT funds by SonomaWORKs providers gives them an advantage when placing customers into unsubsidized jobs. Under the current economic conditions customers that want to work can usually find work. For those who need to develop addition work skills or increase their work experience there are the Work Experience and Community Services programs. However, some employers would still like to take advantage of tax credit and OJT reimbursement programs. OJT adds a new dimension to job development for CalWORKs customers. When the economy changes placing CalWORKS customers into jobs will become more challenging. SonomaWORKs has positioned its self well by having this option available to its providers and employers.

³ Jerry Dunn, Employment and Training Division Director

Sonoma County providers have the flexibility of doing Grant Diversion or JTPA Title II or Title III OJTs for CalWORKs customers. Grant Diversion OJTs are complicated and cumbersome and Santa Clara County has avoided using this type of OJT. When selected, some of the Fresh Start Community Services providers in Santa Clara County may have the flexibility to use JTPA OJT funds in transitioning customers into jobs if they are JTPA funded for that activity. Job Club, Employment Connection, Work Experience customers do not have direct access to JTPA OJT placements. We should explore the possibility of setting aside a small amount of JTPA Title 1178% funds or the WIA equivalent for use by the Employer Services and Marketing unit. This unit is responsible for developing jobs and work experience sites for CalWORKS customers.