

**A ROADMAP TO THE FUTURE BENEFIT PROGRAM INTEGRATION
IN SAN FRANCISCO
Kim Seamans*
Executive Summary**

INTRODUCTION

The Sonoma County Human Services Department CalWIN plan includes the development of a new business model that includes the integration of the benefits programs to different degrees. This is a challenging opportunity to develop a new way of doing business with a client-centered focus, that will ultimately benefit our agency as well as the communities we serve. Benefit program integration can and should be accomplished to certain levels before implementation of CalWIN. This case study serves to highlight two integration projects that illustrate how implementation can occur to improve customer service and prepare for automation.

PROGRAM INTEGRATION PROJECTS

I studied two integration projects at the San Francisco Department of Human Services; integration of the Non-Assistance Food Stamps (NAFS) program with the Medi-Cal program and integration of CalWORKs Intake with employment retention services, called ADVANCE! The NAFS and Medi-Cal integration pilot seeks to increase communication and coordination between NAFS and Medi-Cal staff. It also aims to reassure applicants at the Harrison St. office that they will receive speedy and efficient services from either program. The ADVANCE! Project, which provides job retention and career advancement services to post-aid clients and to

new or returning applicants with recent job history, assists applicants with maintaining or obtaining employment at the earliest time possible. A component of ADVANCE! is the use of diversion funds as a tool to assist new and returning applicants with obtaining or retaining employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I make the following recommendations for our agency to undertake to further our goals of program integration:

- Continue the Economic Assistance integration plan with the goal of fully crosstraining all Employment workers (EWs) in NAFS, Medi-Cal, CMSP and GA before CalWIN implementation.
- Determine the need for job retention services at SonomaWORKS intake for new and returning applicants.
- Convene a workgroup to study how best job retention services and diversion payments could be utilized to assist applicants with maintaining or obtaining employment before going on cash aid.
- Determine the need for automated data collection and reporting for new, post-aid and returning Employment and Training clients. Study the feasibility of utilizing the ADVANCE! automation system or developing a system suited to our department's needs.

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INTRODUCTION

With CalWIN automation looming on the horizon, our agency has a unique opportunity to closely review service delivery models and make changes to improve service while preparing for the upcoming changes brought by automation. As a member of the Sonoma County Human Services Department's Integrated Services Committee, I have a particular interest in developing a service delivery model that provides a full range of services to clients without unnecessary duplication of information and effort. I chose the San Francisco Department of Human Services for this case study because of its focus, like Sonoma County, on improving customer service and to take advantage of the opportunity to observe and learn from the benefit program integration projects it has undertaken.

BACKGROUND

The City and County of San Francisco Department of Human Services places a high value on excellent customer service. Benefit programs are delivered from several buildings. This case study is based on observation of two different pilot projects: 1) the Employment Services Program ADVANCE! Integration Project at 170 Otis St. and, 2) the NonAssistance Food Stamps (NAFS) and Medi-Cal Integration Pilot at 1440 Harrison St. In connection with the Harrison St. pilot, I also learned about Medi-Cal Initial Services Unit. This unit was conceived to develop a comprehensive service model and techniques to be employed in the future throughout the program and contributes to the success of the NAFS/Medi-Cal integration project.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The San Francisco Department of Human Services is organized into three divisions, Administration, Family and Children's Services, and Economic Support/Self-Sufficiency. The integration projects I studied are both part of the Economic Support/Self-Sufficiency division.

The Economic Support/Self-Sufficiency division encompasses Adult Services, the County Adult Assistance Program (CAAP), CalWORKs, Employment Support Services, Housing and Homeless, Medi-Cal and Non-Assistance Food Stamps. There are approximately 1040 employees in this division, 359 of whom are in the Medi-Cal or Non-Assistance Food Stamps programs, including managers, analysts, supervisors and line staff.

NAFS AND MEDI-CAL INTEGRATION

The NAFS/Medi-Cal Integration pilot is underway at the Harrison St. Medi-Cal office. The Harrison St. office is the main Medi-Cal office for the department.

There is a small Food Stamps unit housed at Harrison as well. The Food Stamps unit was placed at Harrison St. to provide an alternative application site for aged, blind and disabled customers. In this less intense environment, clients feel more comfortable and safe than they would at the main Food Stamps application site located at the department's adult assistance site at 1235 Mission Street.

The impetus to try program integration came when the staff and management at the Harrison St. office identified the need to improve customer service and decrease lobby waiting time and congestion. Established processes and intake schedules at Harrison contributed to delay, duplicate interviews, and congestion in the lobby during peak hours.

In November 2001, staff and management at Harrison began a Service Integration Pilot for Medi-Cal and Food Stamps intake. The goal of the pilot is to increase communication and coordination between Non-Assistance Food Stamps staff and Medi-Cal staff to assure that persons who apply for benefits are speedily and efficiently evaluated for eligibility to all benefits from either program for which they want to apply. The pilot also supports the NAFS program goal of increasing Food Stamps cases by 80% by providing an alternative application site and capturing those customers who originally intend to apply for Medi-Cal only. San Francisco wisely included all levels of staff in the strategic planning effort.

San Francisco's strategy to integrate Food Stamps and Medi-Cal includes:

- Creation of a multi-disciplinary unit composed of workers from both programs.
- A single interview and verification collection process conducted by one worker whenever possible.
- Integration of procedures, forms, schedules and operations of the two programs to the extent possible with the goal of eliminating or reducing the delay and redundancy for customers and staff.
- Inclusion of support staff to eliminate or reduce operational inefficiencies.

CHALLENGES TO INTEGRATION

San Francisco identified several challenges to the Food Stamps/Medi-Cal integration pilot. These included:

- Staff resistance to change. Staff needs time to adjust to new ways of doing business.
- Separate and very different intake procedures for the two affected programs. The Food Stamps intake operation closes at lunchtime while the Medi-Cal intake continues. This contributes to a backlog of waiting clients on busy days.
- Case clearance obstacles. Closed cases must be located at a different building and brought to Harrison. Before the pilot, all Food Stamps case clearance occurred at a different building, delaying the process due to transit time.
- Organizational resistance to shared program responsibilities. There is resistance by some management staff to the idea of having staff from Medi-Cal supervise Food Stamps eligibility workers.
- Staff learning curve. Staff needs time to learn new program rules.

OUTCOME OF INTEGRATION PILOT

Many obstacles and issues have been resolved in the five months since the pilot began. Support staff complete case clearances and file folder preparation on-site for NAFS. Reception staff notifies NAFS staff of intake appointments. Medi-Cal can accept the Food Stamps Statement of Facts to determine eligibility. Medi-Cal staff completes the Food Stamps Statement of Facts with the applicant to expedite the Food Stamps application process. Waiting time in the lobby has decreased. Communication and case information sharing between programs has increased.

One unexpected catalyst to improving communication between the NAFS and Medi-Cal line staff was the month-long re-wiring of the 1st floor. The construction work necessitated the move of the Food Stamps unit to the 2nd floor where they sat near Medi-Cal eligibility staff. The physical proximity naturally promoted more communication between the staffs of the two programs. This improved relationship continues although the Food Stamps staff has returned to their original unit area downstairs.

LESSONS LEARNED

The San Francisco staff identified these lessons learned:

- Affected staff must continually be updated on the progress being made on the project's goals.
- Early steps and expectations should be formalized in writing and shared with all staff.
- Have one person assigned to the task of monitoring how the process is working, continually checking in with staff and taking informal measurements.
- Staff will not bring problems up until things reach a crisis in many cases. Involve enthusiastic, supportive people from the beginning.
- Make changes slowly to build a comfort level. In general, staff needs about 3 months to adjust to each change.

FUTURE PLANS

Future steps for Medi-Cal/NAFS pilot include:

- Addition of more Medi-Cal staff.
- Implementation of automated forms and data flow management.
- Equalization of staff coverage by staggering work schedules.
- Initiation of discussion regarding addition of more NAFS staff.

ADVANCE! INTEGRATION PROJECT

The second integration project I observed is a pilot project in the Employment Services Program. This project integrates employment services into the CalWORKs intake process. Like the Food Stamps/Medi-Cal Integration Pilot, the goal is to provide appropriate services and aid at the earliest possible time in the intake process.

The Career Advancement Retention and Employment Systems (ADVANCE!) Project provides retention and career advancement services to both post-aid clients and new or returning applicants with recent job history. San Francisco began this project in August 2001.

The intention of the ADVANCE! Project interview is to conduct a proactive interaction with the applicant, providing job search and other services, as well as financial benefits. The goals of this project are to:

- Engage the new applicant and re-applicant with employment services immediately.
- Provide more staff to help the applicant with re-employment.
- Inform applicants about Diversion and refer to a Diversion appointment.
- Provide job retention service during the intake process.
- Connect re-applicants with their previously assigned Retention Specialist, if the individual is still within the 24-month post-aid retention period.

Staffing for the ADVANCE! Project includes nine Job Retention Specialists and three Career Advancement Specialists who rotate duty days. The primary function of the Job Retention Specialist is to proactively engage and communicate with post-aid CalWORKs participants by identifying and addressing issues that relate to job retention and career advancement. They are the primary case managers of post-aid cases. The primary function of the Career Advancement Specialist is to work on employment issues such as hard skills, basic education, job coaching, employer relations and career paths. Both positions participate in multi-disciplinary team meetings to present cases, determine appropriate referrals and develop job retention plans.

Cash aid intake workers screen applicants to determine if they are a likely candidate for the ADVANCE! Program. Screening criteria includes:

- Loss of a job and the last pay check was within nine months
- Is or has been employed part time or full time and/or is working but has a low income.
- Is a non-needy payee who has recently lost a job.

Cash aid is never delayed for individuals referred to the ADVANCE! worker, however, one goal of this program is to maximize the use of diversion funds and/or provide services to the applicant to help them minimize time spent on aid.

USE OF DIVERSION FUNDS

San Francisco uses diversion funds as a tool to assist re-applicants or new applicants obtain or retain employment as an alternative to going on cash aid. Diversion funds are used in many ways to provide this temporary assistance including:

- Payment of household expenses until receipt of the first paycheck.
- Purchase of tools, equipment or uniforms to enable an individual to accept a job offer.
- Car repairs or transportation expenses.
- Other expenses related to obtaining or maintaining employment.

ADVANCE! DATA TRACKING SYSTEM

The ADVANCE! Program developed three goals and objectives:

- A minimum of 40% of post-aid participants will be positively engaged in a Career Advancement Plan or Structured Career Advancement Activity at any given time.
- 80% of the participants will not return to aid during the 24-month retention period.
- 12% increase in personal family income at the end of the 24-month retention period.

To measure their progress in meeting these goals and objectives, staff recently developed an automated tracking and reporting system also named ADVANCE! This system was developed by staff members of the San Francisco Department of Human Services in response to the growing need for participant and services data used to measure outcomes and program success. The ADVANCE! automation system will serve the data collection and reporting needs for all levels of staff including front-line staff, supervisors, managers, and senior managers. Information in the reports is tailored to meet the needs of each level. For example, frontline staff may receive reports on participants, including contact numbers, assessment results, plan summaries and employment. In contrast, senior managers could receive reports itemizing the total number of customers served for each activity, the percent of completed activities, and the placement rate by worker and program. The eventual intention is to use the ADVANCE! system for all Employment Services Program tracking, instead of GIS.

The prototype for the ADVANCE system is a database titled CARES (Career Advancement and Retention Employment Services). CARES has been in use since October 2001. The CARES database collects basic customer demographic information, employer information and service need assessment information. The ADVANCE system builds on this original prototype but is much more comprehensive, encompassing all of the activities and services provided by the Employment Services Program.

Observations of Phase 1 suggest that the system appears to be remarkably user-friendly and easy to access and move through. Phase II will include but not be limited to the following enhancements: Client search functionality Ability to enter multiple incidents when a participant returns to aid then goes off aid and returns to the retention program Ability to include case narratives for client contacts Automation for determining a change in status from active to inactive Ability to track participants who are referred to and engaged in diversion services Ability to indicate reasons for returning to aid.

CHALLENGES TO PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The biggest challenge to implementation of the ADVANCE! Project was obtaining buy-in by CaIWORKs Intake staff. Staff had to first learn what criteria to follow when referring to the ADVANCE! worker and secondly, how to incorporate the Employment Services focus when screening for eligibility. Progress is being made and referrals increase monthly as Intake staff adapts to these new requirements.

ADVANCE PROJECT OUTCOMES

Because the ADVANCE automation system is so recently developed and is still in the rollout phase, there is no measurable data available yet from this system. However, San Francisco has been collecting data on applications. Staff has been surprised to find that most families served by the ADVANCE! Program have been new applicants to CalWORKs.

Statistics collected for October, November and December 2001 indicate the three most likely reasons for a new applicant or re-applicant to apply for CalWORKs are:

- Marital separation
- Loss of job
- Lack of child support.

Loss of a job is one of the top three reasons for applying for aid. Therefore, employment services that promote a return to the work force and that are offered early in the application process benefit the applicant by preventing unnecessary months on cash-aid.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SONOMA COUNTY

As Sonoma County marches forth into the land of CalWIN, continuing to implement the goals outlined by the Integrated Services team, I recommend the following actions based on what I have learned from the similar efforts in San Francisco.

For NAFS/Medi-Cal integration in Sonoma County:

- Continue to move forward on the integration of the NAFS and Medi-Cal sections, including the General Assistance and CMSP Programs. Given our CalWIN implementation schedule and staffing problems, cross-training all EWs in the Economic Assistance division in all programs offered at this time will maximize available staff now and prepare them for integration of services under CalWIN.
- Include the Economic Assistance Division's integration plan as part of the CalWIN Transition Plan to ensure staff training, classification and administrative issues are addressed as part of CalWIN planning.

For the use of ADVANCE! in Sonoma County, the ADVANCE! Project could be a useful template in transitioning to CalWIN. The CalWIN business model, which calls for integration of intake for all benefit programs, removes the Employment and Training Orientation session that is currently the first step of the SonomaWORKS application process. The following steps are based on the ADVANCE! Project and could be useful to divert or minimize time spent on cash aid for employable SonomaWORKS applicants:

- Determine, through application tracking, if there are enough SonomaWORKS applicants or re-applicants with recent work history that would benefit from immediate employment retention assistance, including diversion payments.

- If numbers indicate a need, convene a workgroup to determine how we could integrate job retention and career advancement services into the intake process, as appropriate.
- Include, as part of the above workgroup's charge, the development of a process to better utilize diversion funds as one of the tools to assist applicants who are newly employed or recently employed to maintain or regain employment as an alternative to receiving cash aid.
- Convene a workgroup to study the ADVANCE! Project automated system to determine if a similar system would improve our ability to track and report on the employment services we deliver both to those receiving cash aid and post-aid recipients.

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