

San Francisco Human Services Agency's JOBS NOW! Program: A Practical Approach

PATRICIA CRAIN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a result of the current budget climate, all human service agencies are looking to create programs that will streamline and consolidate meeting employment goals and lead participants to self-sufficiency.

The economic stimulus package known as The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provides financial appropriations for low-income and unemployed groups. The ARRA appropriations have given counties the ability to expand and implement subsidized employment opportunities that will provide a source of income to low-income families.

San Francisco Human Service Agency (SF-HSA) used the ARRA funds to create the JOBS NOW! program. The goal of JOBS NOW! is to place 1,000 participants in unsubsidized employment by September

2010. SF-HSA has implemented three types of job placement options based on the skill level of the job seekers.

Contra Costa County (CCC) has implemented Subsidized Employment Training (SET), also with the goal of placing 1,000 participants by September 2010. The SET program currently serves exclusively CalWORKS-eligible participants, offering a predetermined hourly wage that is not based on the job seekers' skill level.

I recommend that Contra Costa County adopt the SF-JOBS NOW! program's model of opening eligibility to target other low-income populations and reviewing employment wage options based on the skills of the job seekers.

**Patricia Crain, Eligibility Worker Supervisor,
Contra Costa County Human Services Department**

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Introduction

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) was signed into law on February 17, 2009. The stimulus, or the ARRA, is an economic stimulus package intended to create jobs and promote investment and consumer spending during the recession. Contra Costa County (CCC) is using the stimulus funding to create subsidized employment opportunities by expanding and building upon current employer contacts, as well as by developing new relationships.

CCC's program is called Subsidized Employment Training (SET), and it is an employment activity where participants are matched with employers based on their individual skill set. CCC currently limits participation in the program to those eligible for California Work Opportunity and Responsibility for Kids (CalWORKS). The program was implemented in 1998, imposing work requirements on all applicants who apply for CalWORKS. The work program, Welfare to Work (WTW), requires a Work Participation Rate (WPR) of 32 hours per week for one-parent households and 35 hours per week for two-parent households. When participants meet their hourly work requirement through employment, they assist the county in meeting their state-determined WPR. When counties fail to meet their WPR, financial sanctions are imposed.

San Francisco Human Service Agency (SF-HSA) is using the stimulus to expand its subsidized employment, with the goal of placing 1,000 participants in jobs between May 2009 and September 2010. The program is called JOBS NOW!, and it aims to meet its goal by placing the following target populations in jobs:

- 40% who are recipients CalWORKS
- 20% who are CalWORKS Non-Custodial Parents
- 10% who are transitional-age former foster youth (between 18 to 24 years old)
- 30% who qualify as other low income groups, including those who receive Personal Assisted Employment Service (PAES) or Food Stamp Employment Training (FSET), those who are WIA-eligible economically disadvantaged single adults and dislocated workers, those who are homeless, and those who are ex-offenders

The SF-HSA target population for subsidized employment is large in comparison to that of Contra Costa County. I was interested in the program and wanted to learn more about its funding, the types of job opportunities available, and the salaries of available jobs.

JOBS NOW! Model

The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Emergency Contingency Fund (TANF-ECF) provides federal funds to pay 80% of the cost of subsidized employment programs. The 20% match is funded by non-federal public funds, as well as contributions from participating public, private and sector employers. California will receive \$1.8 billion in federal stimulus funds; of this, SF-HSA will use almost \$25 million to expand employment opportunities for individuals looking for work. SF-HSA subsidizes 100% of the wages of JOBS NOW! participants. The JOBS NOW! program builds upon several job programs already in place:

- Community Jobs Program (CJP)
- Bridge Community Service (BCS)
- VIP Community Service (VIP-Limited English)

- Work Study (WS)
- Public Service Trainee (PST)
- Business Service Stimulus Program (BSSP)

Employment opportunities are organized into three categories:

- Transitional employment in the non-profit sector for job seekers with limited or no work experience
- Employment in the public sector for job seekers with mid-level work experience
- Employment with private for-profits and non-profits for job seekers who are highly skilled

Participants are recruited through SF-HSA, the One-Stop Career Centers, and community-based organizations (e.g. Goodwill and Arriba Juntos). Potential participants are screened for eligibility by SF-HSA at which time the participants undergo an expedited assessment to determine their skills and interests and to assign them to one of the three job placement categories. CalWORKS participants are most often assigned to transitional employment opportunities. To become a part of JOBS NOW!, employers complete an application about their business and the positions they hope to hire for through the program. Applications are screened by the SF-HSA Workforce Development Director, Jim Whelly, and the Contracts Manager, David Curto, who review over 100 applications from employers twice per week. Employers who are approved to participate in the program complete and sign a Wage Subsidy Agreement with SF-HSA. All employers must pay payroll taxes, FICA, SUI, and Worker's Compensation Insurance.

CalWORKS participants who participate in JOBS NOW! continue to receive supportive services through SF-HSA's employment services. Additionally, all JOBS NOW! participants have a case manager who supports them through their transition back into the workforce.

Successes to Date

As of March 26, 2010, there are 2,199 subsidized placements. Six hundred and fifty-eight individuals were placed in Transitional Employment, 652 were placed as Public Service Trainees, and 888 are recipients of Wage Subsidy. The average hourly wage for transi-

tional employment participants is \$11.25, the average for Public Service Trainees is \$12.21, and the average for Wage Subsidy participants is \$35.00. Before JOBS NOW! was implemented, in the period between August 2008 and March 2009, an average of 35 cases per month exited CalWORKS as a result of wage earnings. Between August 2009 and March 2010, this average increased to over 100 cases per month. The goal of JOBS NOW! is to provide participants with improved employment history, which places them in a better position to obtain unsubsidized employment when the program ends. When the program ends, it is expected (but not required) that many employers will hire JOBS NOW! participants permanently. SF-HSA's placement goal has exceeded the predictions made prior to JOBS NOW! implementation.

Obstacles Overcome

I had the opportunity to attend a manager's meeting at which a question was raised by Los Angeles County to San Francisco County regarding the state's policy for NCP eligibility for subsidized employment, as well as their practice and process. Until then, SF-HSA eligibility criteria required that NCPs be below 200% of poverty level. After clarification from the state, it was determined that the combined income of the custodial and non-custodial parent would determine eligibility of the NCP. At the time, there were 1,000 eligible NCP; to certify them for JOBS NOW!, they needed to be screened under the new guidelines. Under the new rules, the NCP would need to contact the custodial parent to get birth certificates, identification documents, and tax returns. Many concerns arose related to this change: one of the primary concerns was protecting those who were victims of domestic violence who have restraining orders in place as a result. After considerable discussion, it was determined that all NCPs currently employed and certified would remain under the old guidelines. It was decided that the new guidelines would be applied at recertification, which happens after six months. In addition, the custodial family must be receiving assistance in California, not just the child. This gives the county the ability to access computer records to obtain the

necessary verifications for NCP eligibility guidelines, while also protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the custodial parent.

Current Challenges

Although SF-HSA has far exceeded its placement goals through JOBS NOW!, capturing employment placement information for the WPR for CalWORKS participants remains a challenge. There is no single reason for this that has been identified; however, the following improvements could be considered:

- Foster better communication between employment specialists and cash benefit workers.
- Enhance current technology.
- Properly train those who backfill positions due to layoffs.
- Reduce the caseload standard.

As funding is being cut, counties face challenging decisions, and they must weigh the factors and implications of cost-effectiveness to continue services.

Implications and Recommendations for Contra Costa County

If CCC implements the JOBS NOW! program model, it would target a larger population of subsidized employment opportunities and it would expand its work activities. To fulfill this model, the following funding (based on cost per participant) would be required:

- \$850 per Jobs Program Community (JPC) slot, which primarily target CalWORKS NCP and PAES participants
- \$1600 per Bridge to Community Service (BCS) slot that targets CalWORKS participants who need work participation while awaiting their next activity

- \$550 per VIP Community Service (VIP) slot for those who are on CalWORKS and have limited English proficiency (LEP)
- \$915 per Work Study (WS) slot for CalWORKS participants attending City College
- \$1,625 per Public Service Trainee (PST) slot for CalWORKS, PAES, Transitional Youth and WIA Adult and Dislocated Workers
- \$2,150 per Business Service Stimulus Program (BSSP) slot, which serves CalWORKS and CalWORKS NCP, PAES, Transitional Youth, and WIA Adult and Dislocated Workers

CCC may not be able to implement all the aspects of JOBS NOW!, but it has started to roll out services to those who are at 200% of the poverty level, as well as issuing other short-term, non-recurring benefits. The JOBS NOW! model can provide guidelines and strategies to help expedite the roll-out.

Next Steps for Contra Costa County

Contra Costa County can consider taking the following next steps:

- 1 Review this case study with the executive team.
- 2 Consider the SF-HSA model for best practices that could be adopted.
- 3 Share and update information with the director and other supervisors and managers in Workforce Services
- 4 Coordinate the roll-out of 200% of poverty services into Welfare to Work business process.
- 5 Determine if the current payroll provider can handle the increase in payroll responsibilities.

To continue to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged counties in California and achieve success, they will have to be willing to share information and work as a team.

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