

Exploring Alignment to Strengthen Connections to Employment

TAMIA NESHEA BROWN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizational behavior reflects leadership; leadership must commit to the impact collaboration will produce. It is time to bring innovation into the programs that serve the most disadvantaged populations so families and individuals are provided opportunities to move towards economic competence and eliminate poverty. There are many uncertainties when it comes to funding; therefore, it is important to have collaborative strategies that are cost-effective and deliver the most impact. California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) now have the foundation

in providing activities to enable better employment and placement options for program participants. It is important to take advantage of the business-led board of the Workforce Development Board and build industry clusters of skilled individuals satisfying the demand of the Greater Bay Area's robust economy. Developing programs for low-skill or low-income workers must go well beyond a "getting a job effort." Understanding the local business needs is critical to aiding in developing a skilled workforce. Alignment of public assistance programs and employment and training programs will grow a skilled workforce to meet labor market demands.

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Introduction

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), reauthorized in 2014, encouraged a closer coordination between Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF) and WIOA public workforce development system. A big step toward a more effective way to improve employment and placement outcomes for low-skill, unemployed, and underemployed workers. The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Children (CalWORKs) program is California's version of the federal TANF program. The CalWORKs programs offers employment activities and can be complemented with WIOA employment activities. In a time of dwindling resources, it is important to note the past decade of downward trends in federal funding for workforce programs. State agencies have had to adapt to a reduction in resources, and as trends continue, local agencies must be nimble and respond to uncertainties in funding. As a result of declining funds, the WIOA service delivery model experienced two major changes: a) reduction in the number of local One-Stop Career Centers and b) reduction in the types of services to businesses and job seekers. The business customers receive less one-on-one assistance in finding workers to fill job openings. The major asset of businesses is their workforce, and to prosper they need a continuous pipeline of skilled workers. The public workforce system invests in building those skilled workers. In addition, it establishes investments needed to continue in order to meet the demand for both a stable and prosperous economy. The public system has the assets and are investing in those assets through CalWORKs and

WIOA. It must be prioritized that industry needs be understood to make sound investments in human resources or capital. The public workforce system must align efforts to enhance and promote a unified business engagement strategy between TANF and WIOA programs.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, California is the fifth largest economy in the world. A large percentage of that economy is centered in the Greater Bay Area. However, the supply of skilled workers has not kept pace with employer demand. The demand for college, post-secondary education, and training has grown over the years. By 2020, 65% of job openings will require at least some post-secondary education and training (Carnevale and Smith, 2015). California's economy is a melting pot of opportunity for people to get the requisite skills needed to enter the workforce. Between March 2019 and April 2019, the total number of jobs in the East Bay counties of Alameda and Contra Costa increased by 6,800 jobs to total 1,198,800 (Natividad Martinez, 2019). The breakdown is as follows:

- Private educational and health services reported the largest month-over increase (up 2,100 jobs), all within health care and social assistance.
- Leisure and hospitality followed with a surge of 1,100 jobs. Gains were split between arts, entertainment, and recreation (up 600 jobs) and accommodation and food services (up 500 jobs).
- Other major industries with significant payroll increases were construction (up 1,000 jobs), manufacturing (up 700 jobs), professional and business services (up 600 jobs), and government (up 500 jobs) (Natividad Martinez, 2019).

Closing the gap between supply and demand for skilled workers will pay off in higher wages for workers. Higher-paid workers will mean more tax revenue for federal, state, and local governments and less dependency on government programs (Carnevale and Hanson, 2015). It is no secret that although California has a booming economy there are many individuals left out and remain earning below the poverty line. The huge cost of living has caused a shocking number of families and individuals to become homeless. Recent statistics show homeless rates rising in California. This, in addition to the rising cost in housing, has had devastating financial impact on the area's homeless youth and seniors. These facts indicate significant disproportions for the low-skilled, unemployed, and underemployed people of California.

Background

The workforce development system uses funding to develop in-demand occupational skills through its workforce programs. WIOA legislation is designed to strengthen and improve the public workforce system. WIOA programs aid those with barriers to employment to move into gainful employment, in addition to recognizing the business customer assisting with hiring and retaining workers, including incumbents.

The CalWORKs programs provides education, subsidized employment, and training programs to assist families moving towards self-sufficiency. This alignment of public assistance and employment and training services will lead to gainful employment and grow a skilled workforce to meet labor market demands. As part of the comprehensive delivery of CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work (WtW) programing, local Human Services Agencies in California are mandated to provide employment services to encourage and facilitate the transition of clients served by their programing to self-sufficiency. Effective WtW programming utilize best practices to include incentive-based programing like subsidized employment programs (SEP) to encourage businesses to select WtW clients over other employment candidates.

Similarly, WIOA programs that are administered by local Workforce Development Boards utilize On-the-Job Training (OJT) programing to incentivize businesses to select the beneficiaries of their workforce development programing over non-incentivized employment applicants. For most counties, the general fund contributes to the participants wage subsidies while participating in a public or private subsidized employment. There is a lot of funding at the state level; however, once the allocations are divided, subdivided, and issued to the local levels, resources are relatively scarce for the county needs. The CalWORKs caseloads have also been on the decline which affects funding at the local level.

CalWORKs and WIOA offers a wide array of services and supports for families to enter and remain in the workforce. It is important to note the CalWORKs and WIOA programs share the same following activities: unsubsidized and subsidized employment, work experience, on-the-job training, adult basic education, job skills training, vocational education, job search and job readiness assistance, and other activities necessary to remove barriers and assist program participants in obtaining employment. The two programs are making strides in the supply of skilled workers; however, operating separately leads to many overlaps and duplication of services that are costly. A design of services in a hybrid model with CalWORKs services matched with a set of services provided by WIOA can lead to better use of staff resources. Staff resources can be redirected to include an industry sector strategy to focus on business needs. Implementing some shared strategies across programs will allow for more succinct set of services that could lead to more individuals receiving effective services that improve skills sets that lead to in-demand occupations, closing the gap of skilled workers. Closely aligning workforce programs would benefit clients, leveraging combined resources and expertise.

Case Study

This case study will lift the promising practice of a "lift and shift" model implemented in Contra Costa

County's Employment and Human Services Agency, which demonstrates the department's strategy to move the CalWORKs SEP management and operations under the direction of the workforce development board to improve outcomes. A strategy that illustrates Contra Costa is moving toward alignment in the CalWORKs WtW and WIOA services, with improvements in employee placements, retention, and moving clients closer to self-sufficiency.

The Contra Costa Works (CCWorks) program leverages investments from WIOA and CalWORKs business engagement activities to create opportunities for public assistance recipients. CCWorks program operations are funded by the county's Employment and Human Services and AB74 funding is used for the wage subsidies. CCWorks at full capacity is a seven-member team lead by the Executive Director of the Workforce Development Board. The CCworks program provides wage subsidy for private and public employers, ranging from \$11 – \$20 per hour. Employers receive wage reimbursement to assist with the first six months of wages paid to their employee. The wage subsidy program can be expanded up to one year. The CCworks program has placed approximately 160 participants. Over the last five years, employers across Contra Costa County have received on average \$140,000 yearly of wage subsidies from CalWORKs program. Program partners worked together to leverage resources and blend funding to create a progression of services for individuals obtaining vocational training through WIOA in a growing sector, subsidized employment through CCWorks to improve skills, provided on-the-job training through WIOA, and included follow-up case management to support retention.

CalWORKs investments are roughly one million dollars annually to support all employment activities, allowing employers to take advantage of substantial wage subsidies, on-the-job training, and incumbent worker training. Employers are also provided a range of business supports, including work opportunity tax credits, small business development assistance, and employer training funds. The collaboration of CalWORKs and WIOA has also led to

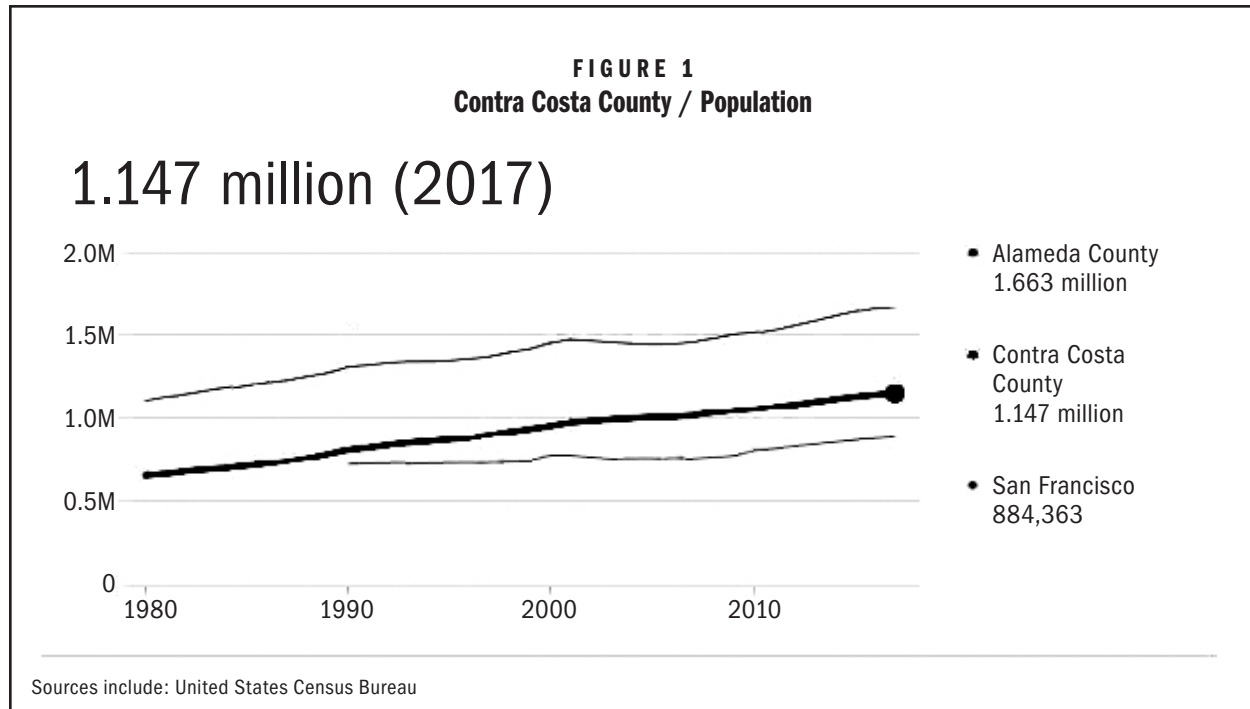
several sector strategies initiatives where investments from both programs are developing a pipeline for health care workers and public sectors workers.

Contra Costa County is located South of Solano County and East of Alameda County. It is one of the nine counties that constitute Bay Area Metropolitan area. Contra Costa County has a population of just over a million people. It is more populated than San Francisco County and less populous than Alameda County (*Figure 1*, next page). It is important to note that this case study was conducted at a time when the overall health of the local Contra Costa economy was very strong with historically low-unemployment levels. At the time of this research the unemployment rate in Contra Costa 3.5%.

Contra Costa County is the fourth-wealthiest county in California, with nineteen cities and twenty-one unincorporated areas. The population is over 1.14 million as of 2018. Contra Costa expends AB74 funding for the CCWorks subsidized employment program. Recent budget strategies provided changes which are intended to improve early engagement of recipients in the welfare to work program and the removal of barriers to their employment. CCWorks methodology for distribution funding for its subsidized employment CalWORKs recipients is though the Workforce Development Board, housed in the Employment and Human Services Agency. Despite these numbers, many Contra Costa families are in crisis and more are struggling to make ends meet, with 11 percent living below the poverty level.

Promising Practices in Contra Costa's CCWorks Program

- Shared business engagement strategy of WIOA and CalWORKs programs;
- Ability to co-enroll across programs with minimum administrative burdens;
- Access to labor market information to meet in-demand occupational needs;
- Capacity to offer employers a broader range of services to meet business needs;
- Ability to address participant barriers succinctly;



- Collaboration among program staff for the benefit of the end-user.

Recommendations

Many opportunities exist for what alignment can look like in Alameda County. A convening by the Alameda County Workforce Development Board with CalWORKs WtW program partners to conduct systems and resource mapping, explore alignment of programs, and improve outcomes for mutual customers would be a good first step. Alameda County can build capacity around alignment of programs and experience the advantages of collective impact. Staff can design and position the activities of both programs to mitigate the time from unemployed to employed. The convening agenda should include:

DEVELOP A JOINT BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

- Direct staff to convene programs from across the system to develop a process;
- At the county level, get information from the business community about what is needed from the workforce system and how to make it easy

and efficient to engage with the public workforce system;

- Identify a set of indicators on business engagement activities and performance, which will assist in gauging the impact of the public workforce systems efforts and help guide future strategies;
- Align education and training programs with labor market demands.

IMPLEMENT CO-ENROLLMENT STRATEGY

- Training to increase cross-program knowledge and understanding of the TANF/CalWORKs and WIOA programs among both agencies' staff members;
- Develop common intake processes for programs and dual program forms, or a data entry system to capture initial information on participants;
- Develop data sharing agreements that align with regulations;
- Design a team case management approach which cross-program teams meet regularly.

CREATE BLENDED FUNDING METHODOLOGIES

- Use funds from across the TANF and WIOA programs to support common services;

- Research and investigate philanthropist funding opportunities;
- Seek partnerships with shared interest;
- Co-invest in long-term skill improvement strategies.

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