

Implementation of a Performance Improvement Model in Employment Services

A Look at Alameda County

TERRIE ADAMS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

California's Welfare To Work (WTW) program is designed to assist participants in becoming gainfully employed during the time they receive CalWORKS benefits from the state. All persons applying for CalWORKS are required to participate in the WTW program unless the participant is exempt. The goal is for all counties to have 50% of their one-parent families and 90% of their two-parent families meet the Work Participation Rate (WPR). For a one adult household, this means working (or participating in work-related activities) for thirty two hours per week; for a two-parent household the requirement is thirty five hours per week. Alameda County's current WPR is 14.1%.

Its goal is to increase their WPR to 18% by the end of fiscal year, June 30, 2009. Alameda County is using a "Performance Improvement Model" along with data reports from Exemplar Human Services to increase their WPR.

Contra Costa County is looking at ways to improve its WPR. I recommend that Contra Costa County look at Alameda County's "Performance Improvement Model" as well as its use of CIS system to produce better reports. It is hoped that Contra Costa County can increase their WPR from the current 26%.

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Introduction

The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility for Kids Program (CalWORKS) was implemented in 1998, taking the place of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and incorporating the work component of the Greater Avenues for Independence Program (GAIN). The rationale for this new approach of combining assistance with the work requirement is to allow adults the opportunity to become self-sufficient, as they become more able to provide for their families without the continued need of county assistance. Adults with children are given an opportunity to receive education and training in order to get the tools needed to gain unsubsidized employment. Supportive services are provided in an effort to help them through this transition. The only requirement to participate in this program is that you must have children in the home living with you ages eighteen and under. California Welfare to Work (WTW) is designed to assist participants in gaining employment to meet the CalWORKS requirement of working or participating in work-related activities for 32 hrs per week for a one-parent household and 35 hours a week for a two-parent household. California WTW operates in all 58 counties, and each county welfare department operates their WTW program locally.

All persons applying for CalWORKS are required to participate in the WTW program unless they are exempt for specific reasons defined in the legislation. If families meet their goals they help counties to meet their Work Participation Rate (WPR) requirements set by the State of California. The goal for each county is to have 50% of their one-parent families and 90% of their two-parent families meeting the WPR.

Alameda County Background

Alameda County has approximately nine thousand CalWORKS recipients who are subject to a work requirement. Its success is measured by:

- CalWORKS work participation rate
- Rate of engagement in work activities
- Participants completion of their WTW plans within 90 days
- Resolution of sanctions
- Employment acquisition rate

Alameda has redesigned its process to increase its Work Participation Rate (WPR). This is achieved by keeping participants engaged in required activities and providing staff with the necessary tools and training to enter the information correctly in the CalWIN system.

Alameda County has contracted with Exemplar Human Services to utilize their data reports to help assist them in implementing a performance improvement model. For the fiscal year 2007, Alameda County's WPR was 10.1%. In the first nine months of fiscal year 2008 its WPR increased to 14.1%. Its current goal is to increase the WPR to 18% by the end of this fiscal year, June 30, 2009.

Performance Improvement Model

The term "Performance Management System," or "Performance Improvement Model" as Alameda refers to it, is an agency performance strategy that consists of an on-going series of integrated meetings during which the director and top managers of different offices use data to analyze their unit's past performance. The team follows up on previous decisions and commitments to improve performance in order to establish its next performance objectives. It also

examines the effectiveness of its overall performance strategies. This approach collects and analyzes data needed to determine the outcome of a participant's performance, identifies areas that may need improvement and gives feedback on policies and practices that would produce better outcomes. It is believed that by gathering such information, bringing all offices together and comparing the differences in outcomes, agencies are helped to set targets for the future. By utilizing this model, departments can avoid the following seven errors of poor performance strategies:

- 1 No clear purpose
- 2 No one with specific responsibilities
- 3 Holding irregular meetings
- 4 No one person is authorized to run the meetings
- 5 No dedicated analytic staff
- 6 No follow up
- 7 No balance between the brutal and the bland

This approach comes from Commissioner William Bratton and the leadership team of the New York Police Department who used this system to reduce the city's crime rate. Other agencies in New York such as the Probation Department, adapted this approach and created the Statistical Tracking, Analysis & Reporting System (STARS).

Alameda County has also found that using the "Performance Improvement Model" approach has been effective. To maximize this effort and achieve the greatest results, Alameda County has incorporated an executive leadership team consisting of the following members:

- Assistant Agency Director (Sam Tuttelman)
- Division Director (Gana Eason)
- Management Analyst (Endalkachew Getaneh)
- Supervising Program Specialist (Rhonda Boykin)
- Program Managers for each Self Sufficiency Centers

The leadership team attends a regularly scheduled monthly meeting in order to monitor and track the progress of the WPR. At these meetings they compare and contrast past and present performances, review statistics related to areas for improvement, and also follow up on previous and future goals set by the team. After the meeting has taken place and

the study has been reviewed by the Assisted Agency Director (AAD), Supervising Program Specialist (PS), Management Analyst (MA), and the Program Manager (PM), they meet with each office's WTW unit supervisors to review each unit's performance, discuss new strategies or issues that may have come up, and make any recommendations needed. After three months of meeting and reviewing the data with each center, the AAD from all bureaus, PS and MA review the outcomes with the Board of Supervisors.

What Alameda Has Done to Improve WPR

Alameda County has since gone through a redesign in order to improve its WPR. Some of the changes made include hiring more social workers, which reduces caseloads, thus allowing current staff to focus more on accuracy in their reports. Utilizing data reports from Exemplar Human Services tracks the engagement status of the participants who are required to participate in WTW activities. As a result of these changes staff is able to receive information through these reports which ensures that participants are engaged in appropriate activities. In the event that a worker encounters problems entering information in CalWIN, there will be continuous in-house training available to them through Staff Development. It is believed that with current on-the-spot data and on-going training, the county will increase its WPR.

The Performance Improvement Report

Alameda County utilized data from Exemplar Human Services and E2lite report from the state monthly to measure four important areas within the Welfare to Work Program:

1 Number of Participants Unengaged

- Number of participants not assigned to a Self-Sufficiency Office Center (SSC) within 30 days of granting
- Number of participants not assigned to an employment counselor following an assignment to a SSC
- Number of participants unengaged in activities greater than 90 days

2 Percentage of Completing Plan Within 90 Days of Approval

- Number of CalWORKs approval not registered for Employment Services-WTW
- Number of participants in Orientation (ORE) over 30 days
- Number of participants assigned to ORE within two weeks of Registration
- Number of participants enrolled in Job Club (JCL)/Job Search (JBS) longer than 35 days
- Number of participants enrolled in Assessment (ASM) over 30 days

3 Sanctions and Curing Sanction Participants

- Number of participants in noncompliance (not participating fully in an approval activity) over 20 days
- Number of participants in sanction (no longer receiving a grant for themselves) status over 50 days
- Number of participants in curing sanction (requesting to be re-engaged in an activity that would allow them to receive their portion of the CalWORKs grant) status over 30 days

4 Employment

- Number of participants from JCL to placement in employment within 45 days. Purpose of this is to show how successful their job placements efforts are in JCL/JBS.

Findings

I had an opportunity to sit in on three meetings where each office received a monthly report on the twelve indicators the department is using to measure efforts to increase WPR. At the Eden Self Sufficiency Center (Hayward Office), the AAD discussed ways to improve and meet the June 2009 goal of decreasing the number of unengaged over 90 days from 320 to 160 cases by June 30, 2009. Below in italics are some of the indicators that were discussed, followed by the response of the Manager and EC Supervisors at the meeting:

- 1 **Number of Participants Not Assigned to a Worker Following Assignment to a Self-Sufficiency Center** Supervisors suggested that clearing cases for

WTW activities, such as orientation, needs to be done immediately. Also receiving weekly reports of unengaged participants

- 2 **Number of Participants Unengaged Greater Than 90 Days** Supervisors suggested a list of all participants that are unengaged as well as to include a start and an end date of the activities they have completed. At this point the employment counselors can review to see what updates are needed and make any necessary corrections.

- 3 **Percentage of Participants Enrolled in Job/Job Search Longer Than 35 Days** Supervisor requested the names of these individuals. The cases are assigned to the Job Club leaders and are offered training on how to complete the noncompliance process as well on how to move cases on a flow process to the employment counselors after the participant's completion of job search.

- 4 **Number of Participants in Non-Compliance Over 20 Days** Supervisor felt this problem is a case management issue. Supervisor also felt some employment counselors are doing their jobs correctly and others may be in need of some additional training on the non-compliance process. Lastly, they felt that the communication between the eligibility worker and employment counselor was not reaching each other in a timely manner in regards to issuing sanctions and releasing them.

Implications and Recommendations for Contra Costa County

Examining Alameda County's approach to increasing its WPR provides a great opportunity to compare and contrast its style of operations to the system currently in place in Contra Costa County (CCC).

Utilizing the "Performance Improvement Model" would be effective in CCC. This approach could assist the department in having a system that would hold staff accountable for their work, identify areas that need improvement, and come up with programs and policies to achieve this goal. Data can be effective in improving job performance but is only as helpful if staff fully understand policy and procedure and know how to enter information into Calwin cor-

rectly. This would in turn increase the WPR. CCC has a real opportunity to improve there results. If CCC can avoid the seven errors of poor performance strategies, the department should show improvement in the upcoming months.

Next Steps

- 1 Produce a detail report through the CIS system to display the engagement status of all work eligible participants.
- 2 Have quarterly scheduled meetings with Workforce Service Director, Social Service Division Managers and Eligibility Work Supervisors to identify areas of success, any operational problems and develop solutions to any problems.
- 3 Produce monthly reports for supervisors and workers to show improved performance, i.e. a report showing the indicators/goals set by the department and how each office is performing toward reaching the goal.
- 4 Have meetings for staff to suggest ways for improvement.
- 5 Produce reports to show recognition of performance.

Teamwork and working together to achieve a common goal is known to help motivate staff to want to process the correct information in the CalWIN system in order to maximize the WPR and in turn produce greater result.

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