

# CalWORKs System Improvement Plan (Cal-SIP) Report

County: Lake

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## Executive Summary

### 1. Please summarize the performance measures selected for improvement.

The Lake County Department of Social Services has identified three performance metrics for improvement:

- Orientation Attendance Rate
- OCAT/Appraisal Completion Timeliness Rate
- Rate of Program Reentries

### 2. Please provide a comprehensive list of improvement strategies identified within the Cal-SIP.

Lake County seeks to improve performance by implementing the following strategies:

*To improve Orientation attendance, LCDSS will:*

Strategy 1: Improve communication on WTW Orientation (with 5 action steps)

Strategy 2: Implement new process/es for referring to/conducting Orientation (with 5 action steps)

Strategy 3: Implement performance incentive payment for attendance/completion (with 4 action steps)

*To improve the timeliness of OCAT completion, LCDSS will:*

Strategy 1: Address the client barriers that prevent OCAT completion (with 3 action steps).

Strategy 2: Fully staff ETW positions (with 3 action steps).

Strategy 3: Implement a new process for scheduling/completing OCAT (with 5 action steps).

Strategy 4: Ensure similar performance measure outcomes are achieved for subpopulations. (With 1 action step).

*To reduce the Rate of Program Reentries, LCDSS will:*

Strategy 1: Make career development and coaching a focus from outset of CalWORKs lifecycle. (With 2 action steps).

Strategy 2: Increase participation in subsidized employment (with 3 action steps).

Strategy 3: Improve the quality of job placements into emerging sectors (with 3 action steps).

Strategy 4: Revamp the county's retention program. (With 5 action steps).

Strategy 5: Ensure similar performance measure outcomes are achieved for subpopulations. (With 1 action step).

## Introduction

The CalWORKs Outcomes and Accountability Review (Cal-OAR) is a local, data-driven program management system that facilitates continuous improvement of county CalWORKs programs by collecting, analyzing, and disseminating outcomes and best practices. As required by Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 11523, Cal-OAR consists of three core components: performance indicators, a county CalWORKs self-assessment (Cal-CSA), and a CalWORKs system improvement plan (Cal-SIP).

The Cal-OAR continuous quality improvement (Cal-CQI) process (which includes the Cal-CSA and Cal-SIP) takes place over five-year cycles. The first Cal-OAR cycle commenced on July 1, 2021, with the implementation of Cal-OAR. The Cal-SIP is the second component of the Cal-OAR CQI process. The Cal-SIP is based on the information gathered and reported from the Cal-CSA, wherein each County Welfare Department (CWD) will develop a plan for improving their CalWORKs program. The Cal-SIP will select a measure or set of measures for focused improvements and development to improve the selected performance measures while pairing each Cal-SIP goal with an equity goal and/ or strategy.

### **1. Describe your approach to the Cal-SIP Report**

Following completion of the CSA, the Lake County Department of Social Services (LCDSS) collected ideas that were documented in a document titled “Focus Areas for Cal-OAR SIP.” LCDSS has been working with a consultant, Public Consulting Group (PCG), to support the Cal-OAR process, and PCG worked with LCDSS to adapt the ideas gathered in the focus areas document, areas identified in the self-assessment, and input gathered in regularly scheduled meetings into potential strategies and action steps to support improvement in performance measures. These were further amended following the Peer Review.

### **2. Briefly describe past and current system improvement efforts.**

LCDSS has undertaken several initiatives related to case management, performance management, business processes, and employment outcomes. These include:

- A virtual option for Orientation, added during the pandemic to improve access/attendance.
- Contract with the Mendocino Private Industry Council (MPIC) to administer the Expanded Subsidized Employment (ESE) program to reduce program reentries.
- Business process improvements to ensure data is entered regularly and accurately into the CalSAWS system to support performance monitoring, and
- Training in trauma-informed practices; this approach has been shown to be effective in establishing relationships and working with certain clients.
- Fully embracing the new CW 2.0 methodology and customizing forms for County use.

**3. Briefly describe the success or failure of those efforts at improving service delivery or programmatic outcomes.**

Client enrollment in ESE has lagged below what was anticipated when the program was initiated. Despite the contract with MPIC, it was observed that appraisal and assessment need to be improved for take up to increase. For example, misunderstanding regarding the minimum experience and education required for certain activities may have created unnecessary barriers and reduced the pool of participants to place in ESE.

**4. An overview of the CWD's organizational vision and mission (optional).**

The mission of the Lake County Department of Social Services (LCDSS) is to promote social and economic self-reliance and protect those who are at risk with efficiency, integrity, and compassion. LCDSS is mandated to provide care and assistance for local children and adults who are endangered by abuse, neglect, or exploitation; administer County, State and Federal assistance programs; and provide services and support to enable families to become financially self-sufficient. These mandates are accomplished through partnerships with the community for integrated services and a work environment that supports exceptional performance through teamwork.

# **Section 1: Measures for Improvement and Strategies**

## **Part 1: Measure and Goal Narrative**

### **1. Describe the reason for selecting the measure or programmatic grouping of measures.**

LCDSS selected two process measures that occur early in the CalWORKs life cycle – Orientation Attendance and OCAT Timeliness – under the Initial Engagement grouping. While some consideration was given to selecting Engagement Rate as a measure for improvement, the county decided to take a “first things first” approach to program improvement. That is, before clients can be effectively engaged, they need to successfully complete Orientation and OCAT.

For the six-month period reviewed in the County Self-Assessment, Lake County’s Orientation Attendance Rate ranged from a low of 31.6% to a high of 48.1%. Statewide data was consistently higher, ranging from 57.9 to 59.9%. Similarly, OCAT/Appraisal Completion Timeliness Rate data available in the Performance Measure Trend Report showed the county lagging behind the state average for that measure (15 - 20 percent compared to 30 - 40 percent). Partners and collaborators alluded to the “information overload” that occurs early in the CalWORKs life cycle, which suggests improvements could be made in the way program requirements and opportunities are communicated to participants. Issues of access (preventing in person meetings due transportation issues or hindering remote interviews due to connectivity gaps) were also raised by partners and collaborators.

LCDSS also selected a third measure for improvement - Program Reentries – that falls under Exits and Reentries. This was selected because it represents an outcome (which the county wanted to address at some level) as opposed to a process.

During the period analyzed for the County Self-Assessment, participants in Lake County returned to CalWORKs at a somewhat higher rate than statewide. Additionally, the re-entry measure is associated with several initiatives that the county has been interested in (e.g., improved post-aid case management) that were identified during partner and collaborator feedback sessions. Accordingly, it was a good fit for inclusion in the SIP.

### **2. Do partners and collaborators agree this is a measure or programmatic grouping of measures that should be focused on at this time?**

At the time of Partner and Collaborator meetings during CSA development the performance measures ultimately included in the SIP had not been identified. However, their feedback on a range of topics gathered during the Cal-OAR Stakeholder Forums held this past Spring is relevant to improvement for the selected measures and was used in identifying the strategies to pursue.

The Program Manager at Employment Services sits on Woodland College’s Business

Advisory Committee, the Lake County Childcare Council, the WIOA Workforce Alliance Local Advisory Committee and participates in several other Human Services Advisory Board meetings. This connection has, in the past, allowed consideration and discussion of programs and classes offered locally that prepare students to meet minimum entry level job requirements for employment as social workers, employment & training workers and eligibility workers to improve and grow the candidate pool at LCDSS.

Ongoing partner meetings with educators locally have indicated they agree that there is opportunity to improve employment outcomes through education as well as increase the numbers of participants choosing career paths that require additional education through marketing strategies that encourage long term success and building on existing relationships.

### **3. Describe any anticipated interactions with other measures.**

As noted elsewhere in the SIP, LCDSS considered Engagement Rate for improvement. However, it was concluded that for that measure to increase, the county should initially focus on improving attendance at Orientation and increasing timely completion of OCAT. Improvement in those areas is expected to have a positive effect on Engagement Rate. Increases in the number of CalWORKs participants that complete Orientation and the OCAT will result in higher engagement because a) the pool of individuals available to take part in activities will increase; b) participants will be better informed about opportunities and thus more likely to take advantage, and c) LCDSS will be able to effectively address barriers that prevent successful engagement for a larger segment of CalWORKs participants.

### **4. Describe how the CWD will track performance measure improvement.**

For Orientation Attendance:

- Reports will be developed to track clients far in advance of the availability of dashboard data. For example, a weekly report of clients approved for CalWORKs can be pulled from the SAWS System and used to pre engage new participants. If Orientation has not been completed within 30 days, outreach will be conducted.

For OCAT Timeliness:

- Reports will be developed to track clients far in advance of the availability of dashboard data. For example, a report of all clients required to complete OCAT could be developed that allows LCDSS to identify those approaching 30 days from CalWORKs approval so that all efforts can be made to complete the appraisal in a timely fashion. An initial survey during JSR to assess and identify reasons for a participant's reluctance to pursue further education could lead development strategies to overcome those barriers to enrollment -- whether perceived or actual.

For Reentries:

- A tracking tool may be developed that lists CalWORKs departures, the frequency of contact with their ETW, the services provided, and employment status. This data can be

used to assess the impact of intervention and whether they are reducing the likelihood of a return to cash assistance. A long-term study tracking former clients that return to CW – their reasons for employment separation – whether it be lack of soft skills, lack of support after CW ends, and research into the relationship between education (or lack of education) and inability to maintain employment long term.

For all measures, LCDSS will monitor the Cal-OAR dashboard to confirm alignment with the statistics generated more frequently through internal reporting.



## Part 2: Goal-level Descriptions

**Goal 1:** Increase Orientation Attendance Rate to 46% from 38%.

Review using Cal-OAR Data Dashboard and internal system reports improving by 2.0% every 6 months within 2 years (for a total of an 8.0% improvement).

**Strategy 1:** Improve communication on WTW Orientation.

**Strategy 2:** Implement new process/es for referring to/conducting Orientation, which may include but not be limited to:

- Drop in' option for Virtual/in person Orientation for CW newly approved applicants.
- Allow applicant volunteers to attend WTW Orientation prior to CW approval.
- Establish a warm hand-off to WTW same day after CW intake (either virtual or in-person).
- Orientation via YouTube video shown/linked to following eligibility interview (3-5 minutes).

LCDSS expects to implement at least one of the options and will conduct research described in action steps to inform decision-making.

**Strategy 3:** Implement performance incentive payment for attendance/completion.

### 1. Explain the reasoning or methodology which was used to determine this goal.

Lake County's Orientation Rate has lagged behind the statewide average by more than ten percentage points. Because Orientation is one of the earliest steps in the WTW "life cycle" LCDSS identified improvement in this area as vital to success in "downstream" measures such as engagement and employment rate.

### 2. What led the CWD to these improvement strategies?

A key takeaway from Partner and Collaborator Engagement sessions was that communication was not always consistent or clear during CW intake. In many instances clients indicated they were not fully aware of the steps that follow approval of cash assistance. These likely impacts show rates for Orientation. And those that did understand the process were not always fully informed of the opportunities presented by participation in WTW activities, and the supports available for those who participate. The CSA did not identify the specific approach that might be best for referring clients to and conducting Orientation, and therefore Strategy 2 includes research that will inform which approach is implemented.

LCDSS discussed an approach for in-person Orientation immediately following in-person eligibility interviews. While this could improve Orientation attendance it could have a detrimental impact on overall access to CalWORKs (i.e., reduce percent of

applications that complete an eligibility interview) and therefore was eliminated from consideration.

### **3. Discuss any research or literature that supports the strategies chosen. Cite reference.**

*Strategy 1:* Communication materials should be clear, concise, and targeted for the proper audience. Using age-appropriate language, simple and clear sentences, and concrete examples, as well as highlighting and summarizing important points are all ways to improve communication.

US Department of Health & Human Services (2021). Clear Communication. National Institutes of Health. Retrieved from: <https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/clear-simple>

*Strategy 2:* Human-Centered Design will inform the approach/es selected as business process changes are considered by considering how the target audience (WTW clients) will be able to best access the information provided in Orientation. This will also include considerations of the “cognitive load” created by the voluminous information communicated.

Murray, D.W., Rosinsky, K., Haas, M., Glosser, A., & Boyd, S. (2022). Applying Human-Centered Design to Human Services: Pilot Study Findings, OPRE Report 2022-214, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/applying-human-centered-design-human-services-pilot-study-findings>

*Strategy 3:* Evaluations have indicated that incentives can promote increases in employment and employment retention. With respect to completion bonuses for activities such as Orientation there is not definitive evidence of their effectiveness, but some research suggests that they are effective as a tool to encourage initial engagement.

Hamilton, G. (2012). Improving Employment and Earnings for TANF Recipients. TANF Research Synthesis Brief Series. Retrieved from: <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/25391/412566-Improving-Employment-and-Earnings-for-TANF-Recipients.PDF>

McConnell, S., Saunders, C., Herard-Tsiagbey, J. (2023). Should Human Services Programs Offer Financial Incentives? Lessons Learned from Two Employment Coaching Programs. Submitted by Mathematica to Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from: [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/OPRE\\_should\\_human\\_services\\_sept2023.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/OPRE_should_human_services_sept2023.pdf) "

#### **4. Describe the roles of other partners and collaborators in implementing the strategies.**

Responsibility for the execution of the strategies to improve attendance at Orientation is largely internal to LCDSS. However, as improvements to communication are implemented it is likely that a range of partners will be included in the distribution and/or display of materials. It is expected that clients will be involved in field testing some new materials to assure readability, clarity, and overall quality.

#### **5. Identify any staff education and training needs, and include any technical assistance needed to implement strategy and achieve goal.**

Significant training will be needed to fully implement the proposed strategies. Staff will need training in the policies and procedures associated with approving and issuing incentive payments. Intake staff will need training on the presentation of Welfare-to-Work, so it is presented in light of the opportunities it offers clients.

Technical assistance may also be required to implement the strategies – for example, LCDSS may need assistance with:

- selection, use, or and/or development of software to track completion of an online Orientation video (if implementation of this approach moves forward); and
- identification of best practices in development of printed materials in delivering program information."

#### **6. Describe how the CWD plans to mitigate and/or address both known internal and external barriers [to achieve the goal].**

A performance incentive payment program (using performance incentive funds) will increase client engagement but must be paid equitably and timely in order for incentives to be effective in the long-term; otherwise, clients will share experiences with others and confidence in the incentive program will suffer. The policies and procedures guiding an incentive program must be clearly documented and trained effectively (and refreshers provided as needed) to mitigate these potential issues. It will also be important for LCDSS to be responsive to clients when questions or concerns are raised about the incentive program, and corrective action taken if a systemic issue is identified.

#### **7. Describe how your facility will continuously evaluate each action step taken to see if improvement is being achieved. (e.g., tracking tools, meetings, monitoring, etc.). Include who will be responsible for follow up and compliance.**

The action steps have been drafted to be process-focused so that they can be checked off as they are completed. The ES Program Manager will be responsible for confirming that steps are completed. The completion of these steps should translate into the overall goal for improvement in Orientation attendance, and reports will be used to track clients in advance of the availability of dashboard data. These may include, for instance, a weekly report of clients approved for CalWORKs. If Orientation has not been completed

within a determined timeframe outreach will be conducted to attempt to engage the client. The Cal-OAR dashboard will be used to confirm statistics tracked internally by LCDSS.

**Goal 2:** Increase OCAT/Appraisal Completion Timeliness Rate to 30% from 20%.

Review using Cal-OAR Data Dashboard and internal system reports improving by 2.5% every 6 months within 2 years (for a total of a 10.0% improvement)

**Strategy 1:** Address client barriers to OCAT completion.

**Strategy 2:** Fully staff ETW positions.

**Strategy 3:** Implement new processes for scheduling/completing OCAT.

**Strategy 4:** Ensure similar performance measure outcomes are achieved for subpopulations.

**1. Explain the reasoning or methodology which was used to determine this goal.**

OCAT/Appraisal Completion Timeliness Rate data available in the Performance Measure Trend Report (July 2021 – December 2021) includes Lake County data for two of the months, with the county statistic between 15 and 20 percent timely while the statewide figures range between 30 and 40 percent. This significant gap – and the clear opportunity for improvement that it represents - is the primary reason this measure was selected.

Note that the combination of improvements in OCAT timeliness and the efforts outlined to improve Orientation attendance are expected to also translate into an increase in Engagement Rate.

**2. What led the CWD to these improvement strategies?**

**Strategy 1:** The CSA identified barriers that clients face to complete the OCAT and to participate in general. The content and length of the OCAT is not conducive to having children present; accordingly, LCDSS wants to assure that all reasonable efforts are made to accommodate parents with young children. And, when a parent is unable to travel to the office where the OCAT is conducted, LCDSS hopes to provide new options for transportation that can provide a ride quickly and efficiently. The Peer Review illuminated the option of a dedicated driver who would be an LCDSS employee and be responsible for providing this service, which is listed as an Action Step for this measure but will be used to support clients at all stages of the CalWORKs life cycle and could impact all the measures included in the SIP.

**Strategy 2:** The CSA identified the significant number of ETW vacancies as an issue that negatively impacted several performance measures. Given that workers are carrying three times the number of cases in an average caseload, are booking appointments four to six weeks out and considering the lengthy time required to conduct the OCAT, the lack of ETWs available to conduct it has a particularly significant impact on OCAT timeliness.

*Strategy 3:* LCDSS is confident that some modification to policies and/or business processes could improve OCAT timeliness. The specific action steps will be informed by further research on what could be the most impactful change, and could include incentive payments to clients upon completion, an increased focus on virtual assessments, and/or home visits to engage new WTW clients.

All strategies will be assessed to assure that equity in service delivery is achieved.

### **3. Discuss any research or literature that supports the strategies chosen. Cite reference.**

*Strategy 1:* Evidence indicates that basic needs must be met before clients can successfully engage in WTW, and failure to address a barrier can impact a client's ability to complete OCAT timely (or at all) and ultimately reduce the client's chances of achieving self-sufficiency.

Dworsky, A., Courtney, M. (2007). Barriers to Employment among TANF Applicants and Their Consequences for Self-Sufficiency. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*. Barriers to Employment among TANF Applicants and Their Consequences for Self-Sufficiency - Amy Dworsky, Mark E. Courtney, 2007 (sagepub.com).

*Strategy 2:* The cited study addresses the impact of mission attachment and how it impacts an organization's ability to retain staff. "Human services employees showed a positive attitude toward the agency's mission, but dissatisfaction with working conditions—pay and career advancement—overrode the role of mission attachment in employee retention." This suggests that improved pay and opportunity for career advancement are needed to address the shortage of ETWs.

Seok Eun Kim and Jung Wook Lee (2007). Is Mission Attachment an Effective Management Tool for Employee Retention? An Empirical Analysis of a Nonprofit Human Services Agency Is Mission Attachment an Effective Management Tool for Employee Retention? An Empirical Analysis of a Nonprofit Human Services Agency - Seok Eun Kim, Jung Wook Lee, 2007 (sagepub.com).

*Strategy 3:* The same concepts of human-centered design that may be applied to business processes associated with Orientation could also be used for process improvement designed to address OCAT timeliness.

Murray, D.W., Rosinsky, K., Haas, M., Glosser, A., & Boyd, S. (2022). Applying Human-Centered Design to Human Services: Pilot Study Findings, OPRE Report 2022-214, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/applying-human-centered-design-human-services-pilot-study-findings>

Research related to incentive payments is also applicable for OCAT timeliness.

McConnell, S., Saunders, C., Herard-Tsiagbey, J. (2023). Should Human Services Programs Offer Financial Incentives? Lessons Learned from Two Employment Coaching Programs. Submitted by Mathematica to Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from: [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/OPRE\\_should\\_human\\_services\\_sept2023.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/OPRE_should_human_services_sept2023.pdf).

#### **4. Describe the roles of other partners and collaborators in implementing the strategies.**

Lake County is a CalHR 'MERIT Systems' County. Internally, there are several groups involved in efforts to fully staff ETW positions. While Managers interview and make hiring recommendations, the candidate pool is largely determined by the Merit-based testing and selection process. In addition, the inability to attract a larger pool of applications is directly related to a non-competitive pay structure in the county and telework opportunities outside the county out of our control.

- LCDSS would need to work closely with any educational institutions (including the Deans of educational institutions and school counselors) where outreach/recruitment of potential candidates would be conducted.
- LCDSS may reach out to other CWDs for information on how they connect with potential applicants (example: Sonoma's virtual class).
- Any changes to hiring practices would require significant work on the part of the county's HR Department.

Responsibility for the execution of the other strategies to improve OCAT timeliness is largely internal to LCDSS. As is the case with any initiative that impacts clients, it will be vital to identify what needs to be communicated to them and how to best do so and modify processes if needed based on their feedback.

#### **5. Identify any staff education and training needs, and include any technical assistance needed to implement strategy and achieve goal.**

For Strategy 3, the training required to implement incentive payments for OCAT completion are largely the same as would be required for Orientation attendance incentives.

#### **6. Describe how the CWD plans to mitigate and/or address both known internal and external barriers to achieve the goal.**

The ability to successfully implement Strategy 2 (fully staff ETW positions) is impacted by some factors outside of the LCDSS' control. Most notably, the hiring process is dictated by county civil service requirements that cannot be modified. This barrier can be partially mitigated by successfully implementing the other Action Steps as they are not interdependent.

And as will be the case with Orientation incentives, any incentive payments associated with OCAT completion must be paid equitably and timely in order for them to be effective.

**7. Describe how your facility will continuously evaluate each action step taken to see if improvement is being achieved. (e.g., tracking tools, meetings, monitoring, etc.). Include who will be responsible for follow up and compliance.**

The Employment Services Program Manager will be responsible for assuring progress is made on the individual action steps that contribute to the overall strategies. To support more detailed tracking of progress on the measure as whole, LCDSS will use administrative data to monitor clients' progress following CalWORKs approval. The measure is defined as "Percent of WTW Active Participants and Exempt Volunteers who complete OCAT/Appraisal within 30 days after aid is newly granted." With that requirement in mind LCDSS will develop methods to track clients and identify those that are approaching the 30-day deadline, identify and track the number of days when obtainment of childcare holds up the process, take action to conduct timely appraisal if possible. Because individuals with a break in aid less than six months are not included as those required to complete an appraisal, tracking will be developed that omits this group. The Cal-OAR dashboard will be used to confirm statistics tracked internally by LCDSS.



**Goal 3:** Decrease Rate of Program Reentries to 44% from 52%.

Review using Cal-OAR Dashboard and internal system reports increasing by 2.0% every 6 months within 2 years.

**Strategy 1:** Make career development and coaching a focus from outset of CalWORKs lifecycle.

**Strategy 2:** Increase participation in subsidized employment.

**Strategy 3:** Improve quality of job placements into emerging sectors.

**Strategy 4:** Revamp retention program.

**Strategy 5:** Ensure similar performance measure outcomes are achieved for subpopulations.

**1. Explain the reasoning or methodology which was used to determine this goal.**

In quarters for which data is available participants in Lake County returned at a higher rate than statewide. For exit quarters in 2021 data for Lake County is available for Apr-Jun and Oct-Dec; in these periods, Lake's rate of re-entry is 6.8 and 8.5 percentage points higher than the state average, respectively. When exploring possible causes of this differential, several interventions were identified that could address the problem in different ways. Consequently, Program Reentries was a clear choice for inclusion in the SIP.

**2. What led the CWD to these improvement strategies?**

LCDSS recognizes that the circumstances that result in re-entry do not all occur after CalWORKs cash assistance ends. Accordingly, these strategies capture efforts that occur throughout the CalWORKs life cycle but should all contribute to a reduction in program re-entries. These include development of coaching skills for staff that work with CalWORKs participants, improvement in the quality of jobs into which clients are placed, and changes to the way staff work with clients who have left CalWORKs.

**Strategy 1:** Goal-oriented case management is a significant component of CalWORKs 2.0 and LCDSS' full implementation was hampered by the COVID19 pandemic. Cal-OAR presents an opportunity to re-affirm its importance. This strategy approaches the prevention of reentries in a holistic manner – acknowledging that all the steps in the CalWORKs life cycle can contribute can increase the chance of a permanent exit from the program when it occurs.

**Strategy 2:** The county's ESE program was "rebooted" in early 2023, and LCDSS' partner (the Mendocino Private Industry Council - MPIC) required time to develop the employer relationships and agreements needed to make the program successful. After several months of the partnership the number of CalWORKs clients engaged in the ESE program is extremely low, and this presents a significant opportunity for improvement.

*Strategy 3:* The CSA identified the need for improved coordination with CareerPoint (the county's workforce development one-stop) as a means to improve the volume and quality of job placements. A more structured process for referring WTW clients should give more clients the opportunity to use these services.

*Strategy 4:* LCDSS has always recognized the importance of high-quality and case management for CalWORKs "leavers." However, staffing shortages have forced the Department to de-prioritize this work in favor of families still receiving cash assistance. Promoting job retention through case management and other means must clearly be a component of any effort to reduce the number of clients who return to CalWORKs.

### **3. Discuss any research or literature that supports the strategies chosen. Cite reference.**

*Strategy 1:* Research indicates case managers can be served well by tools and supports that help clients navigate career decisions and create achievable steps on the way to larger goals.

Schwartz, D., Gardiner, K., Joyce, K., McConnell, J., and Saunders, C. (2020). Family Development and Self-Sufficiency (FaDSS): Implementation Findings from the Evaluation of Employment Coaching. OPRE Report 2020-177. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/family-development-and-self-sufficiency-fadss-implementation-findings-evaluation>

*Strategy 2:* Subsidized employment programs can be successful in providing TANF participants with income to support their families and employment experience that contributes to long-term success.

Pavetti, L., Schott, L., and Lower-Basch, E. (2011). Creating Subsidized Employment Opportunities for Low-Income Parents: The Legacy of the TANF Emergency Fund. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Center for Law and Social Policy. <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/files/Subsidized-Employment-Paper-Final.pdf>

*Strategy 3:* Labor Market Information can be used to help TANF clients identify employment opportunities. Working more closely with CareerPoint will allow clients to access expertise and information on jobs with potential to provide long term economic growth.

Joyce, K., Gould-Werth, A., Derr, M., Sanchez-Eppler, E., Clowney, C., and Roberts, L. (2015). Using Data to Connect TANF Clients to Good Jobs: An Opportunity to Foster WIOA Partnerships. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/final\\_using\\_data\\_to\\_connect\\_tanf\\_clients\\_122115\\_complete.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/final_using_data_to_connect_tanf_clients_122115_complete.pdf)

*Strategy 4:* The Individual Placement and Support Model (IPS) IPS, a model for helping people find employment, was originally designed for individuals with serious mental illness. IPS' success in improving employment outcomes suggests it or its key principles could result in success across broader populations that struggle finding and keeping employment.

Elkin, S. and Freedman, L. (2020). Individual Placement and Support: Background and Directions for Future Research. OPRE Report 2020-139. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

[https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/BEES-IPS\\_Framing%20Paper-508\\_JC.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/BEES-IPS_Framing%20Paper-508_JC.pdf)

The “Radar Approach to Job Retention” is one case management model that can help identify issues that can result in job loss before they impact a client’s employment. It is a model that has been endorsed by the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals and could be used as part of an enhanced retention program.

<https://www.nawdp.org/events/EventDetails.aspx?id=1746120&group=>

These and other methods will be considered as LCDSS works to enhance case management for clients after they leave CalWORKs.

#### **4. Describe the roles of other partners and collaborators in implementing the strategies.**

*Strategy 1:* Execution of this strategy (emphasizing career development and coaching) will be largely internal to LCDSS. Improving collaborative efforts with local colleges may present opportunities to better encourage clients to pursue education as a way to open up career path opportunities and expand employment options in growth industries.

*Strategy 2:* Successful collaboration with MPIC is essential to the success of the subsidized employment program. In addition, LCDSS and MPIC must establish clear lines of communication with the employers who participate in the program to rectify issues before they threaten to derail a client’s placement. MPIC will help LCDSS attain the program reentry goal by linking CalWORKs participants with ESE employers that align with the clients’ skills and interests. By doing so, the ESE placements are more likely to “stick” and result in employment that leads to successful (permanent) transitions off cash assistance.

*Strategy 3:* As the county’s workforce development one-stop, CareerPoint can have a major role in identifying emerging sectors and matching clients with opportunities in those sectors. LCDSS will need to work closely with CareerPoint to establish a more systematic process for identifying, referring, and tracking clients that are good candidates for them to serve. If the process for referring clients to Career Point is improved upon, the one-stop will help LCDSS attain the program reentry goal by placing

more job-ready CalWORKs participants in employment with growth potential that reduces the chance of re-entry.

*Strategy 4:* Execution of this strategy (strengthening the retention program) will be largely internal to LCDSS.

**5. Identify any staff education and training needs, and include any technical assistance needed to implement strategy and achieve goal.**

Training will be needed to address any process changes associated with these strategies - these include but may not be limited to conducting effective assessments and how their results dictate appropriate referrals to MPIC for ESE and CareerPoint for job placement. Job sector growth industry information with a focus on ongoing training for workers will help clients identify appropriate and clear career paths. And training in case management for ETWs working with CalWORKs exiters may be needed to supplement previous curricula that have had a different focus.

Having all staff attend the new REIB (Racial Equity and Inclusion) trainings along with trauma-informed practices will positively impact every worker's ability to understand their participants behaviors, actions and motives and help to build better relationships along with continued use of CW 2.0 tools and methods.

**6. Describe how the CWD plans to mitigate and/or address both known internal and external barriers [to achieve the goal].**

External factors could play a significant role in LCDSS' ability to reduce returns to CalWORKs. Shocks to the economy such as natural disasters or epidemics or a more gradual downturn in economic growth could result in job losses that wipe out any improvement realized through the Department's efforts. In these situations, LCDSS will consider re-focusing client engagement efforts on education and other opportunities that do not translate into immediate employment and case closure but could serve clients well after an economic downturn subsides.

**7. Describe how your facility will continuously evaluate each action step taken to see if improvement is being achieved. (e.g., tracking tools, meetings, monitoring, etc.). Include who will be responsible for follow up and compliance.**

The Employment Services Program Manager will be responsible for assuring progress is made on the individual action steps that contribute to the overall strategies. One option to evaluate progress is to develop a tracking tool that lists CalWORKs exiters and allows staff to enter the frequency of contact with clients, the services provided, and employment status. This data can be used to assess both the processes established to support job retention and the impact of intervention (whether those services and contacts are reducing the likelihood of a return to cash assistance).

## **Section 2: Peer Review**

### **Peer county/ counties selected for collaboration and consultation:**

Yuba

#### **1. Discuss how the Peer Review process impact Cal-SIP development.**

Prior to the Peer Review session, LCDSS had drafted several possible strategies and action steps to address three performance measures.

The afternoon portion of the discussion with Yuba County centered on these measures. Staff from Yuba County were fully engaged throughout the Peer Review and provided important perspectives on their approaches for performance improvement.

#### **2. Discuss steps taken to conduct peer review.**

Staff from Yuba County visited Lake County in person on November 1, 2023, for the first full day in-person Peer Review session. This timing allowed LCDSS to develop initial strategies to discuss while providing the time necessary after the peer review to tackle new ideas and changes generated during the review before the SIP is submitted in draft to CDSS.

Yuba County has some similar characteristics with respect to size and demographics and it was determined that they would be a good fit. The geographic proximity of Yuba County to Lake allowed for an in-person meeting, which both counties agreed would produce a more meaningful and collaborative discussion. Six staff from Yuba County participated in the review – the Employment Services Program Manager, a Program Analyst, a CWs/WTW Program Specialist, a Social Worker Supervisor, and two WTW case managers. In addition, two consultants from Valley Vision that Yuba County has been working with attended.

Staff representing LCDSS included the Department Director, Deputy Director for Eligibility/WTW, Program Manager for Employment Services, CalWORKs Program Manager, two WTW Analysts, a WTW Supervisor, CalWORKs Supervisor, CalWORKs Analyst, and Supervising Analyst. Two consultants from Public Consulting Group working with LCDSS on Cal-OAR also attended.

The morning agenda included time for introductions, an office tour, a review of Lake County's organizational structure, and a discussion of the County Self-Assessment. The afternoon session focused on the Performance Measures LCDSS selected and the potential strategies and action steps associated with each.

#### **3. Briefly summarize observations and action items from Peer Review process.**

The information below summarizes the discussion on each of the three performance measures.

Orientation Attendance – Yuba County’s approach is predicated on a model that relies primarily on in-person eligibility interviews. This allows for a brief WTW Orientation to be incorporated into the office visit – clients can be walked over to the ETW conducting Orientations following the interview if it appears they will be eligible for CalWORKs. Conversely, LCDSS does not intend to alter its focus on phone intake interviews, as it is assumed this would be a barrier to program access for many clients. This discussion did illuminate the possibility, however, that LCDSS could adopt a model that transfers a client to someone who could conduct the WTW Orientation by phone immediately after the eligibility interview.

OCAT Timeliness – When a WTW Worker assigned to conduct an OCAT is unable to reach a client to schedule the appointment, home visits are an option that Yuba County has explored. While some workers initially hesitate to conduct home visits, seldom if ever do problems arise and staff have recognized home visits can be an effective method for engaging some clients. Note that the OCAT is not conducted at these visits (due to lack of computer equipment to support it) but the home visit allows the WTW Worker to introduce themselves to begin building a relationship and schedule a time to complete the assessment.

Yuba County does not have the large number of staff vacancies that so seriously impact LCDSS. The issue of staffing was addressed in the context of OCAT timeliness because the gap between Orientation and OCAT is due largely to a shortage of ETWs in Lake County. Some of the options for increasing the number of job candidates, streamlining hiring, and improving retention included:

- Presentation of “a day in a life” of an ETW / SW worker on social media (generated an increase in potential applicants in Yuba)
- Monetary retention incentives
- Employee referral incentives
- Development of a candidate pipeline through local school districts and community colleges
- Workshop with practice tests, interviewing tips, and mock interviews for job candidates
- Articulation of a clear career ladder

Program Reentries – The strategies discussed for reducing program reentries cover the period both during and after cash aid is received. While a client is receiving cash aid, activities that could result in higher paying and/or more stable employment would presumably lessen the chance of returning to CalWORKs. Accordingly, the Peer Review included discussion of the value of educational activities (which may delay program exit but reduce returns), goal-setting and coaching techniques, and subsidized employment/OJT opportunities.

Peer Review participants discussed alternative approaches for providing post-aid case management, including frequency of contacts, transitional benefits, and client receptivity

to engaging with the program after cash has stopped (the latter is often a challenge). As is the case with the other measures, the fact that Yuba County has generally been close to fully staffed has allowed for a greater focus on this aspect of WTW.

## Section 3: Target Measure Summary

**Goal 1:** Increase Orientation Attendance Rate to 46% from 38%., Review using Cal-OAR Data Dashboard and internal system reports improving by 2.0% every 6 months within 2 years (for a total of an 8.0% improvement).

### Performance Measure:

Orientation Attendance Rate

**Baseline Result: 38%**

Cal-SIP Start Time:	Progress Report #1:	Progress Report #2:	Cycle End Date:
5/1/2024	5/9/2025	6/12/2026	6/30/2026

### Strategies, Action Steps, and Tracking Improvement:

**Strategy 1:** Improve communication on WTW Orientation

#### *Action Steps:*

- Train staff on explaining next steps prior to WTW Orientation when scheduling the appointment.
- Assess materials given to clients for clarity, repetitiveness, and volume.
- Create phone call script for WTW Orientation worker to use to remind clients of Orientation.
- Develop updated, eye-catching materials (e.g., invitations/letters/postcards) with Orientation info and/or brochure to hand out /include in application packet.
- Add other languages to materials as needed to support equity in program access.

**Strategy 2:** Implement new process/es for referring to/conducting Orientation, which may include but not be limited to:

- “Drop in’ option for Virtual/in person Orientation for CW newly approved applicants.
- Allow applicant volunteers to attend WTW Orientation prior to CW approval.
- Establish a warm hand-off to WTW same day after CW intake (either virtual or in-person).
- Orientation via YouTube video shown/linked to following eligibility interview (3-5 minutes).

LCDSS expects to implement at least one of the options and will conduct research described in action steps to inform decision-making.



### *Action Steps:*

- Research to inform approach - Evaluate impact of time between CW approval and scheduled Orientation on attendance.
- Research to inform approach - Survey no-shows (and other clients) on barriers to attendance.
- Research to inform approach - Survey CW intake attendees to gauge WTW participation interest, understanding of next steps, understanding of WTW benefits, including Orientation among other benefits.
- Evaluate/identify approach/es most likely to have significant impact – includes contacting counties (e.g., San Joaquin) that have created Orientation videos and posted on YouTube.
- Develop workflows/process documents needed to successfully implement change.

### **Strategy 3:** Implement performance incentive payment for attendance/completion

### *Action Steps:*

- Determine how completion of Orientation will be monitored, tracked, and verified (will be predicated on decisions made in Strategy #2) so that incentives can be issued equitably and accurately.
- Confer with counties that have successfully implemented an incentive payment program.
- Identify dollar amount to be provided as incentive.
- Establish process for issuing payments (Incentive Program development, policy, update to CW Plan with CDSS).

### **Tracking Improvement:**

The action steps have been drafted to be process-focused so that they can be “checked off” as they are completed. The ES Program Manager will be responsible for confirming that steps are completed. The completion of these steps should translate into the overall goal for improvement in Orientation attendance, and reports will be used to track clients in advance of the availability of dashboard data. These may include, for instance, a weekly report of clients approved for CalWORKs. If Orientation has not been completed within a determined timeframe outreach will be conducted to attempt to engage the client. The Cal-OAR dashboard will be used to confirm statistics tracked internally by LCDSS.

**Goal 2:** Increase OCAT/Appraisal Completion Timeliness Rate to 30% from 20%, Review using Cal-OAR Data Dashboard and internal system reports improving by 2.5% every 6 months within 2 years (for a total of a 10.0% improvement).

**Performance Measure:**

OCAT/Appraisal Completion Timeliness Rate

**Baseline Result: 20%**

Cal-SIP Start Time:	Progress Report #1:	Progress Report #2:	Cycle End Date:
5/1/2024	5/9/2025	6/12/2026	6/30/2026

**Strategies, Action Steps, and Tracking Improvement:**

**Strategy 1:** Address client barriers to OCAT completion.

*Action Steps:*

- Inquire about childcare needs as early in the CalWORKs life cycle as possible.
- Create play space in office if children must be brought to interview.
- Address transportation issues (e.g., dedicated Department employee who provides rides).

**Strategy 2:** Fully staff ETW positions.

*Action Steps:*

- Increase the number of qualified applicants.
  - Conduct Human Services career presentations at colleges.
  - Offer class to help applicants navigate the MERIT process (e.g., Sonoma's).
  - Publicize opportunities on social media.
  - Encourage current LCDSS staff to apply.
- Explore possibility of/advocate for additional benefits available to ETWs (also promotes retention).
  - Annual or monthly stipends for healthcare, education, etc.
  - Modify bonuses to existing staff for referrals.
  - Convert unused VAC or SL to cash at end of each year.
  - Information about internal opportunities.
- Explore ability to modify hiring requirements.

**Strategy 3:** Implement new processes for scheduling/completing OCAT.

*Action Steps:*

- Conduct research to inform approach – Identify where time gaps occur in current process.
- Implement completion incentive payment (align with Orientation incentive process).
- Evaluate/identify approach/es most likely to have significant impact.
- Develop workflows/process documents needed to successfully implement change.
- Improve virtual OCAT experience.

**Strategy 4:** Ensure similar performance measure outcomes are achieved for subpopulations.

*Action Steps:*

- Track data on subpopulations on a monthly basis. (Note: the small size of Lake County's CalWORKs caseload can make meaningful tracking of subpopulations difficult and/or not illustrative.

**Tracking Improvement:**

The Employment Services Program Manager will be responsible for assuring progress is made on the individual action steps that contribute to the overall strategies. To support more detailed tracking of progress on the measure as whole, LCDSS will use administrative data to monitor clients' progress following CalWORKs approval. The measure is defined as "Percent of WTW Active Participants and Exempt Volunteers who complete OCAT/Appraisal within 30 days after aid is newly granted." With that requirement in mind LCDSS will develop methods to track clients and identify those that are approaching the 30-day deadline, identify and track the number of days when obtainment of childcare holds up the process, take action to conduct timely appraisal if possible. Because individuals with a break in aid less than six months are not included as those required to complete an appraisal, tracking will be developed that omits this group. The Cal-OAR dashboard will be used to confirm statistics tracked internally by LCDSS.

**Goal 3:** Decrease Rate of Program Reentries to 44% from 52%, Review using Cal-OAR Dashboard and internal system reports increasing by 2.0% every 6 months within 2 years.

**Performance Measure:**

Rate of Program Reentries

**Baseline Result: 52%**

Cal-SIP Start Time:	Progress Report #1:	Progress Report #2:	Cycle End Date:
5/1/2024	5/9/2025	6/12/2026	6/30/2026

**Strategies, Action Steps, and Tracking Improvement:**

**Strategy 1:** Make career development and coaching a focus from outset of CalWORKs lifecycle.

*Action Steps:*

- Train/re-train ETWs on coaching techniques (e.g., short-term steps needed to achieve long-term goals).
- Identify when education is needed for an identified career and create the training pathway required to achieve the goal.

**Strategy 2:** Increase participation in subsidized employment.

*Action Steps:*

- Identify causes and address low referral rate to MPIC.
- Incorporate discussion and/or exploration of ESE into standard work plan development.
- Develop materials to publicize ESE opportunities.

**Strategy 3:** Improve quality of job placements into emerging sectors.

*Action Steps:*

- Create standardized process for analyzing and acting on information about emerging sectors and new employers.
- Develop direct referral to CareerPoint for participants meeting certain criteria.
- Explore partnerships with specific employers to create a pipeline of CalWORKs participants.

**Strategy 4:** Revamp retention program.

*Action Steps:*

- Create standardized process for identifying reasons clients who return to CalWORKs; use this to inform retention and/or coaching model on an ongoing basis (e.g., need for soft skills related to client/employer communication).
- Develop standardized expectations for frequency and content of ETW's follow-up post-aid.
- Train staff in case management practices that support/encourage job retention.
- Add performance incentive payment for keeping job.
- Create marketing effort to encourage client participation in retention program.

**Strategy 5:** Ensure similar performance measure outcomes are achieved for subpopulations.

*Action Steps:*

- Track data on subpopulations on a monthly basis. or as data becomes available. (Note: the small size of Lake County's CalWORKs caseload can make meaningful tracking of subpopulations difficult and/or not illustrative.

**Tracking Improvement:**

The Employment Services Program Manager will be responsible for assuring progress is made on the individual action steps that contribute to the overall strategies. One option to evaluate progress is to develop a tracking tool that lists CalWORKs exiters and allows staff to enter the frequency of contact with clients, the services provided, and employment status. This data can be used to assess both the processes established to support job retention and the impact of intervention (whether those services and contacts are reducing the likelihood of a return to cash assistance).