

ENGAGEMENT OF WORK PARTICIPANT

American Institute for Full Employment

1. CASE MANAGEMENT STAFF

Key lessons

- Where possible, consolidate functions into one worker.
- If that is not possible co-locate workers
- If different workers in different organizations then coordinate

Examples

- New York City consolidated eligibility and case management functions
- Minneapolis created co-located teams of eligibility workers, case managers and vendors
- Denver had specialists who did both eligibility and case management. They have recently split off the case managers to be part of their Workforce Development Division but maintain close coordination. Denver co-locates some case managers with the Child Welfare workers (foster care).
- Texas has eligibility and case management workers in separate departments but they are well coordinated

2. COMMUNITY SERVICE EMPLOYMENT

Key lessons

- It has been underutilized.
- Is often incorrectly characterized as being make-work and punitive.
- Can be very effective when it is well structured, supervised and has a connection to actual work
- Its primary purpose is for job readiness: showing up on time, appropriate dress, and appropriate behavior at work with other workers, supervisors and public.
- It is not for everyone. It generally should be of short term duration.
- It is one of the best strategies that states have for meeting the new TANF regulations.

Examples

- Most states have very small programs. Maryland recently brought together local agency directors to discuss how to increase the use of community service.
- A handful of states have large programs: New York, Wisconsin, and Texas.
- Many local programs have created community service slots in their own agency. This provides the agency with firsthand knowledge about the community service program. They also end up hiring some of the individuals.

3. DIVERSION

Key lessons

- Multiple different models of diversion programs have proven that if given a choice, many individuals who choose not to go on to cash assistance.
- Diversion programs can be used to immediately send a message that participation in work activities is mandatory.
- Diversion programs can be used both front and the back end.
- Many families have a short-term crisis and only need help for a few months. They don't need to or want to get involved with the regular welfare system.

Examples

- Many states, such as California, have diversion programs, but are not using them.
- The states of Maryland and New York both offer one time diversion payments. Maryland has analyzed its program and concluded that most participants did not go on to receive cash assistance after receiving the diversion payment.
- Minnesota has an innovative 4 month diversion program, which requires participation in work activities each month. This has greatly reduced the

number of families go on to their regular welfare program. It also immediately engages participants in work, which the regular program is unable to do.

4. ELIGIBILITY

Key lessons

- There is an important connection between work program case management and eligibility. Eligibility needs to be re-determined when a participant changes jobs or refuses a job.
- Fraud and error prevention are important because these efforts can reduce the caseload and free up funds to be used to engage participants, for work supports and for other purposes.
- Centralized units and technology can be used to make the eligibility determination process more efficient.

Examples

- New York City reduced its caseload by tens of thousands of cases through the use of finger imaging, front-end verification and data matching.
- Many local programs are now using call centers for routine changes.
- The state of Texas is privatizing its entire eligibility process.
- Many states have set up their information systems so that eligibility will be triggered when case managers report a new job.

5. EMPLOYMENT PLACEMENT

Key lessons

- Tax credits for participants and employers are very important.
- Developing close relationships with businesses and industry is essential.
- Work experience, subsidized jobs and other programs can be targeted to employers, who are willing to place participants in unsubsidized jobs.

Examples

- The earned income tax credit for working families can bring their income above the poverty line.
- Fed Express is headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee. They have established a very close working relationship with the local TANF program and employ many participants.
- Most local programs go out of their way to establish a good working relationship with the business community.
- In several states such as Texas, the local workforce development boards are running the TANF program. These boards are run largely by the business community.
- Many states have large numbers of participants, who are working and continue to receive a small assistance grant. New Jersey has encouraged many of these participants to leave the program by offering them small work support payment for a limited period of time.

6. ENGAGEMENT OF EXEMPT PARTICIPANTS

Key lessons

- Many of the individuals who have traditionally been exempted from work by the TANF program can be engaged in activity and can work.
- Assessment should be standardized and ideally done centrally. It should also be a functional assessment which identifies what activities a person can do.
- Targeted programs can be very effective.
- Some individuals need treatment. This can be built into their employability plan as a mandatory activity.
- This is one of the largest problems facing the TANF program. Most states have exempted a large group of participants, who have physical or mental disabilities or substance abuse issues. With TANF reauthorization they will need to engage this population.
- States can tap into their already existing vocational rehabilitation provider networks.

- It is important to use all available sources of information to find out what issues participant have. With consent, Medicaid files can be used to identify substance abuse and mental illness issues.

Examples

- New York City built a series of specialty job centers to serve the needs of specific groups. For instance, there was one for substance abusers, one for participants with mental and physical disabilities, one for veterans, and one for immigrants. They all had positive results in terms of engagement in activity, and eventual placement in jobs.
- Denver, has a large immigrant population, and built a special program for that population.
- Detroit and Seattle both a programs, which engage pregnant participants. Both programs focus on nutrition, health and family issues. Detroit has been successful in placing participants in jobs or lining them up for jobs.

7. FAITH AND COMMUNITY-BASED GROUPS

Key lessons

- These groups can be important partners and can focus on areas that government can't do or that government has trouble addressing.
- These groups know and care about the community.

Examples

- New York and Los Angeles are using faith-based and community groups to do home visits for cases that have been sanctioned and for child-only cases. They can sometimes influence participants to cooperate.
- Detroit is using faith-based groups for offender reentry programs.
- St. Louis is using faith-based groups to run transportation programs and to run programs that promote healthy relationships and marriage.

- In Newark, faith and community groups are involved with a wide variety of activities from mentoring to summer jobs for high school kids.

8. FEDERAL REPORTING STRATEGIES

Key lessons

- Federal requirements and the incentives and penalties attached to them can drive state and local behavior.
- Effective use of data and information systems is essential.

Examples

- The recent reauthorization of TANF is forcing states to engage more participants in activities which will count as work.
- Maryland has refocused its TANF program to meet the new federal requirements.

9. CASE MANAGEMENT IT SYSTEMS

Key lessons

- It is essential to have a case management system that will track participant activities and outcomes.
- Most systems in the US are old and not ideal. They don't have to be replaced. Much can be gained by making incremental improvements and making the best of what is available.
- Many states have increased efficiency and access by simply making their systems accessible through the internet.
- The interface between eligibility and case management systems is important.

Examples

- Most states understand the value of a good case management system and are struggling to upgrade or replace their system.
- There are also some examples of excellent locally developed systems that interface with the state, although these often run into trouble if the state replaces its system or mandates use of its system.

10. MANAGE BY EFFECTIVE USE OF DATA (JobStat and similar models)

Key lessons

- This is a management approach that can be used to increase participant engagement by focusing on the groups of participants who are not engaged.
- Use this to bring the attention of the entire organization from the commissioner to the line worker on a select group of outcomes and data.
- Everyone can be held accountable with clear incentives and disincentives for their performance.

Examples

- Many states have successfully tried variations of this approach.
- Atlanta, Georgia is a good example. Several years ago it had one of the lowest participation rates in the country. It completely bought into the concept of full engagement in work activities. It developed a version of JobStat which tracked activities and outcomes to the worker level. Managers, supervisors and workers all used JobStat information to improve their performance

11. OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Key lessons

- Good management and operations can have a huge positive impact. This is equally true at the local level.

Examples

- Set goals for engagement and employment
- Make engagement an agency top priority
- Management sending a clear signal
- Develop staff carefully with oversight—encourage bottom-up
- Don't reduce funding and staffing as caseloads decrease
- Coordination with other program areas that affect welfare participants
- Provide local managers with authority and flexibility
- Establish good relationships with the community & employers

12. PERFORMANCE CONTRACTING

Key lessons

- Too often contracts pay for processes which don't achieve desired objectives. This is particularly true with treatment programs which often pay for empty beds even though there are waiting lists to get into the program.
- Contracts which pay on a small number of carefully selected outcomes will achieve those outcomes.
- Competition helps everyone improve.

Examples

- Many programs are using or starting to use contracts which are outcome based. Some examples include Baltimore, Maryland, New York City, Atlanta Georgia and Memphis Tennessee.
- Recent contracts focus on engagement in work activities, placement in jobs, retention in work and/or leaving and staying off of cash assistance.
- San Diego, California has operated a competitive model. It is competitive in multiple ways. Vendors compete in the RFP process. Since multiple vendors are selected, they compete operationally. County staff operate one area and compete with the vendors.

13. RETENTION

Key lessons

- Many small steps and a few large ones can help participants retain employment and become less reliant on benefits.

Examples

- A key in the US has been creating on-going work supports and making them readily available. Examples include: extended Medicaid, child care, the earned income tax credit, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's very innovative Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS) which allows families to keep their rent payment in an asset building account.
- Tarrant County, Texas has worked with a company (Business Access) to develop a whole series of distance learning

modules which help working participants keep their job and acquire skills to advance to better jobs. Participants who complete the program get to keep the PC that comes with the program.

- Kansas City, Missouri set up peer groups of TANF participants who help each other.
- A number of cities are tying section 8 housing vouchers to participation in work activities.

14. SANCTION

Key lessons

- Sanctions are an important but difficult part of any program.
- Small sanctions of just the participant's portion of the grant have resulted in large numbers of individuals who opt to take the sanction and not to participate.
- Full sanctions can actually increase participation and result in far fewer individuals being sanctioned.

Examples

- Both New York and California have partial sanctions and have had tens of thousands of cases opt out.
- Texas recently replaced its partial sanction with a full family sanction which also took away Medicaid for the participant. As a result, sanctions dropped to just a few percent and participation in work activities increased.

15. WAGE SUBSIDY

Key lessons

- It is highly effective if targeted to individuals who have had trouble finding a job.
- Because they are actual wages, it can also include the earned income tax credit.
- It can be used to establish a good relationship with employers end up hiring participants into unsubsidized jobs.

Examples

- Kansas City developed a program that used the Cash Assistance grant and the Food Stamp allotment for the subsidy.
- Seattle has successfully run a large scale wage subsidy program.
- Hennepin County, Minnesota set up a pool of \$175,000/year. This is used for the first \$5.15 per hour. Employers must cover the amount above \$5.15.
- Baltimore, Maryland has developed three different models for its wage subsidy program. She is now offering wage subsidy jobs for individuals who have been on assistance for more than 60 months.
- The Community College of Denver, Essential Skill Program for TANF participants is using paid subsidized employment to move beyond a traditional training program. The program uses job readiness, targeted training and paid subsidized jobs which are related to the training.

16. UP-FRONT ACTIVITIES

Key lessons

- Job search and job readiness activities can be made a condition of eligibility while the application is being processed. This sends a very clear message that participation is an expected part of the program.

Examples

- Illinois and many states have made this a part of their program. At one point, Illinois stopped doing this then put it back because the caseload started increasing.

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