



## **San Mateo County**

# **CalWORKs Self Improvement Plan (Cal-SIP) Report**

for the California CalWORKs Outcomes and  
Accountability Review (Cal-OAR)

Prepared for the California Department of Social Services

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**COUNTY OF SAN MATEO**  
HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY  
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

# CalWORKs System Improvement Plan (Cal-SIP) Report

County: (San Mateo)

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# Executive Summary

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

The Engagement Rate measure was selected for system improvement during this first 2021-2026 California CalWORKs Outcomes and Accountability Review (Cal-OAR) cycle.

San Mateo County Employment Services (ES) is focusing on increasing the clients' participation in Welfare to Work (WTW) activities. The identified barriers to participation have included information overload, insufficient service capacity to connect clients to needed services, and the perceived "benefits cliff." Strengthening partnerships with internal and external partners, providing ongoing training to staff that focus on best practices when working with clients, improving our demographic data collection to identify trends for targeted improvement, and increasing client access to services should help to increase clients' participation in WTW activities and improve the Engagement Rate.

## 2. Please provide a comprehensive list of improvement strategies identified within the CalWORKs System Improvement Plan (Cal-SIP).

San Mateo county seeks to improve their performance by implementing the following strategies:

Strategy 1: Develop an annual training calendar to ensure staff stay up to date with the most current best practices when providing services to clients (With 2 Action Steps);

Strategy 2: Improve partnerships with internal and external partners to support client participation and success (With 5 Action Steps)

Strategy 3: Improve demographic data collection to enhance understanding of underserved populations and identify tools to measure success of efforts to address unmet needs (With 5 Action Steps);

Strategy 4: Increase clients' access to services (With 4 Action Steps);

Strategy 5: Refine process and guidance when conducting the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT) and using OCAT results in the initial meeting (With 4 Action Steps).

## Introduction

The 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) will take place over five-year cycles. The first Cal-OAR cycle commences 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, each 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

San Mateo County (SMC) Human Services Agency (HSA), Employment Services (ES) SMCWorks utilized tools provided by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and its California Outcomes and Accountability Review (Cal-OAR) website to plan and draft the California System Improvement Plan (Cal-SIP) report. The SMCWorks Program Manager, Management Analyst, and Supervisors watched the recorded webinars and reviewed the resources available on the Cal-OAR County toolkit and/or attended the Cal-SIP Cohort 1 and 2 training sessions facilitated by Mathematica to further understand the various tools available when identifying Cal-SIP goals and strategies. Tools were modified to adapt to the specific and unique needs of SMCWorks, including internal timelines, workplan, partner and collaboration identification, mapping, data analysis and engagement processes. The SMCWorks team also scheduled meetings with the CQI Specialists to ask questions and to review timelines, processes, and/or the draft of the Road Map tool used to ensure SMCWorks was approaching the Cal-SIP process in the right direction.

SMCWorks approached the Cal-SIP as an opportunity for SMC ES to review its available data to identify trends as they relate to the Cal-OAR performance measures to further examine the current CalWORKs Welfare to Work (WTW) program, its services and supports, and strategies to enhance employment services to the community. In addition, SMC ES contracted with Public Consulting Group (PCG) to facilitate focus group interviews and the Peer Review as part of SMC's Cal-OAR process. The CSA, as well as PCG's reports regarding findings/themes identified during the focus groups and peer reviews were reviewed to assist in identifying the strategies to focus on to achieve our goal of improving engagement rates for the Cal-SIP report.

Additionally, an annual training calendar will be developed to ensure staff remain up to date with the most current best practices when providing services to clients.

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

San Mateo County focuses on working with clients to ensure they have the education and training necessary to join a career path that leads to self-sufficiency, and the job search resources necessary to secure and maintain such employment. Despite including these components in our program design, our county has engaged in a Quality Assurance (QA) effort to improve these components.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were dedicated staff to provide post-aid case management services to increase engagement and to further support the clients' transition off CalWORKs so that they could maintain employment and/or pursue higher education with further supportive services. Due to staffing shortages and a hiring freeze, the post-aid case management position has been vacant. However, despite not having case management support, the Job Development Specialists (JDS) continue to provide support as needed and the Resource Center community workers are tasked with reaching out and engaging post-aid clients and offering ancillary services, such as transportation, childcare, and/or other supports. In addition, although more research is needed on how to improve post-CalWORKs clients' wages and/or job outlook, policy changes have been made to support increased ancillary services to post-aid clients. Leadership is also reviewing the current staffing model to increase concentration to post-aid engagement and retention efforts.

In addition, one change that was made during the COVID-19 pandemic was the pivot of the Resource Center to offer virtual workshops in job search strategies, resume support, and job search. These services are available to the public and accessed by current and post-CalWORKs clients for support. Quick Response (QR) codes are utilized for materials distributed in hopes of increasing utilization of the Resource Center website and services. Clients indicated that this has increased their knowledge of resources and supports available. Virtual services continue to be offered, as well as in person services in the three Resource Centers strategically located throughout the county.

Based on feedback received, financial literacy, conflict management, and professional communication are the workshop topics requested by clients. In addition, clients have provided feedback indicating a preference for in-person workshops and noting that they were experiencing difficulties in engaging and participating in virtual workshops. As such, Employment Services is now offering a series of in-person workshops to be held throughout the three regional Resource Centers and at the Vocational Rehabilitation Center's location. One area to continue to develop is strengthening our partnership with our work development board NOVAworks, directed by the NOVAworks Workforce Board to provide customer-focused workforce development services. Employment Services attends monthly meetings facilitated by NOVAworks that includes a consortium of other community-based organizations (CBOs) to identify strategies to enhance services for

job seekers, including workshops, staffing and recruitment assistance, pre-layoff assistance and outplacement services, employee training and retention services, and professional development programs.

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

When SMCWorks was unable to fill the dedicated Post-Aid Employment Services Specialist (ESS) vacancy during the COVID-19 pandemic, an alternative solution was to have the Resource Center community workers transition to assist in providing ancillary services to clients transitioning off CalWORKs, in addition to the JDS continuing to provide support as needed. The JDS worked with the regional ESSs to identify clients that needed JDS support services, which resulted in the JDS developing rapport with those clients during job search, placement, and/or job development services. The JDS also provides retention and coaching support, as well as regular communication to follow-up and discuss work progress and/or address job retention concerns. This resulted in the JDS becoming the clients first contact when experiencing issues on the job.

While there has been success in that the clients were able to continue receiving transportation, childcare, and/or other financial supports provided by the community workers and support from the JDS, there was inconsistency in providing the same level of support and services to all post-aid clients since the community workers and JDS support all SMCWorks clients and were not dedicated to post-aid clients. As such, we have now hired an ESS dedicated to support post-aid clients to ensure consistency in the level of services and supports offered to clients transitioning off CalWORKs, as well as to provide further employment and retention case management services.

Implementing QR codes and adding them to the materials distributed by Employment Services was a strategy identified in hopes of making it easier for clients to access the Resource Center websites that lists additional information and resources available within San Mateo County. Based on feedback received from the clients, the QR codes have been successful in that they found it provided easy access to the Resource Center webpage as all they had to do was scan the code. The clients indicated that the Resource Center website also provided access to current information and events taking place at the regional Resource Centers. The QR code also allows clients to store information on their phones rather than needing paper copies of the information available. Unfortunately, at this time, SMCWorks does not have a way to track QR code usage or how many visitors are accessing the Resource Center website, which would help to better understand the impact and success of utilizing QR codes.

As noted previously, Employment Services is now offering a series of in-person workshops that are being held throughout the three regional Resource Centers and at the Vocational Rehabilitation Center's location based on feedback received from the clients. Overall, the clients who have attended the in-person workshops have provided

positive feedback as noted in the evaluations that are distributed at the end of each workshop. However, the challenge is that attendance at each of the workshops is low, ranging between 0-6 clients.

Over the last few months, there has been a steady increase of visitors to each of the regional Resource Centers. As such, Employment Services staff continue to strategize on how best to market the workshops to gain more participants. This includes researching the possibility of offering incentives for workshop attendance and participation. Currently, we are sending out emails to various county departments, as well as to program staff requesting that they encourage client participation. The flyers are also shared with our NOVAworks partners, posted in each of the regional Resource Centers and Vocational Rehabilitation Center, and copies are handed out to visitors. In addition, the Resource Centers host Employer Recruitment events and one strategy is to hold workshops on these days to further encourage workshop participation that would support the recruitment event, such as interview preparation.

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

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors has focused its attention and resources on a shared vision that reflects the goals and priorities expressed during a series of community meetings. This Shared Vision 2025 provides clear goals and a framework to achieve the vision of "A safe, prosperous, livable, environmentally conscious, and collaborative community." San Mateo County HSA is a partner in this vision.

The Agency goals and objectives provide a framework that will guide each division to the development of its own targets mapped to the Agency goals and outcomes. This provides unified direction and a "clear line of sight" that will guide the Agency, its divisions, and its employees towards realizing our mission of "enhancing the well-being of children, adults, and families by providing professional, responsive, caring, and support service."

# 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.**

During the focus group sessions, information overload and resource connections for clients appeared to be the resounding concerns noted by clients, staff, and other partners and collaborators. In addition, providing ongoing training to staff and improving partnerships with internal and external partners was recognized as contributing to improved service provisions to clients. As such, SMC identified the Engagement Rate measure as the focus area for improvement as we saw this as an opportunity for growth and program enhancements to address some of the concerns noted.

Engagement is when mandatory CalWORKs recipients are participating in an approved WTW activity. Engagement is an area SMCWorks views as an essential element to build rapport and relationships with the clients when engaging them in WTW participation. Strategies that improve participants' engagement rates in WTW activities could help to improve the clients' motivation on developing and/or refining skill sets to help them obtain, maintain, and/or retain employment. By focusing on the engagement rate, we hope to further identify reasons for low participation, including the barriers and/or hardships the clients experience to identify and develop strategies for improved outcomes. Our goal is to ensure the clients stay informed of and are connected to the different program services, supports, and incentives available to them to support WTW participation.

While conducting the data analysis for our Cal-CSA report, we also noted that approximately 10% of active WTW clients list Spanish as their primary language. However, given the small sample size of demographic information available, SMC was unable to identify activity trends. As such, one strategy is for SMC ES to work on improving its demographic data collection to identify trends and determine services and supports needed to further address accessibility and resource connection for SMC's Spanish-speaking population. This includes reviewing our current informational materials/resources offered by SMC ES, such as brochures, flyers, and/or workshops, and ensuring they are available in languages other than English. During our Cal-CSA process, we discovered that the language most often spoken by clients, other than English, is Spanish. To address this linguistic need, 57% of Employment Specialists and 67% of SMC Works team, including job developers, supervisors, and community workers, are Spanish speaking.

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

Partners and collaborators provided direct feedback on the Engagement Rate measure for targeted improvement. Although specific priorities were not identified, partners and collaborators identified several areas where the engagement rate could be improved. Specifically, during the focus groups, there were common themes identified which included information overload, inconsistent customer service, service provider



prioritization and impact of the perceived benefits cliff. Feedback from internal staff, external partners, and clients point to a need to clearly communicate program services and supports available, including researching the possibility of developing contracts with CBOs to allow for service provider prioritization.

In addition, SMCWorks staff requested more and regularly scheduled training on coaching, human-centered design principles, CalWORKs 2.0, and best practices to stay informed of employment services and to enhance engagement efforts when conducting assessments and working with clients.

The strategies and action plan developed were reviewed and included feedback provided by our partners and collaborators.

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

By improving our Engagement Rate, we believe there will be impact to other measures, including the Education and Skills Development, Employment Rate, and Rate of Exits with Earnings measures. By adopting strategies to not only increase client participation in WTW activities but also on strategies to keep them engaged to continue participating, the clients are expected to increase their education and/or experience leading to employment and wage outcomes. SMCWorks is also working on identifying various Education and Work Study programs in industries that allow for promotability to increase opportunities for employment with better wages, which may improve the clients who are re-applying and re-entering in the program. In addition, our plan is to also reach out to clients who are currently not participating using identified engagement strategies which can further improve our Sanction and Sanction Resolution rates.

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

SMC ES will be monitoring, tracking, and analyzing the results of the strategies used to improve the Engagement Rate on an ongoing basis. We will identify timelines for each action item, use the Cal-OAR data dashboard provided by CDSS, the individual-level data and the county's ad hoc reports, and review progress monthly to ensure we are on track in meeting our goals. We will also create a table and chart for the monthly progress and will review disaggregated data to determine underlying trends and subpopulations for focused outreach.

In addition, we have created a manual log during the CalSAWS transition period to ensure that we continuously collect the data and monitor the engagement rate. The manual log is a temporary workaround to ensure we are correctly capturing data for engagement, OCAT, orientation and sanction during the transition from CalWIN to CalSAWS. This will also be used as a validation tool to ensure that the CalSAWS reports are correct.

For each action item completed, we will analyze if there is a change or improvement in the Engagement Rate data. This way it can be determined or accessed if we need to re-visit and review our strategies as needed. We will also reach out to our internal and external partners to gather additional feedback if they are noticing any changes. We also plan to conduct a survey or a focus group to interview clients to gather feedback on the results of the strategies implemented.

## Part 2: Goal-level Descriptions

**Goal 1:** Increase Engagement Rate to 20% from 12%. Review using Cal-OAR data dashboard, county ad hoc reports, individual-level, and disaggregated data improving by 2.0% every 6 months within 2 years.

**Strategy 1:** *Develop annual training calendar to ensure staff stay up to date with the most current best practices when providing services to clients.*

**Strategy 2:** *Improve partnerships with internal and external partners to support client participation and success.*

**Strategy 3:** *Improve demographic data collection to enhance understanding of underserved populations and identify tools to measure success of efforts to address unmet needs.*

**Strategy 4:** *Increase clients' access to services.*

**Strategy 5:** *Refine process and guidance when conducting the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT) and using OCAT results in the initial meeting.*

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

Client engagement rates decreased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and re-engagement efforts have been a challenge in the post-pandemic environment, especially as the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency was expiring (and has since expired). We heard from the clients, staff, and partners and collaborators that the inability to access services, information overload, and the perceived “benefits cliff” impact their WTW participation. As such, improving Engagement Rates was seen as an area of focus for our program.

Staff noted receiving ongoing staff training could contribute to improved engagement rates as they can then stay up to date with best practices when working with clients and motivating them to engage and participate in WTW activities. Suggested staff trainings included refresher trainings to ensure consistent information across programs, CalWORKs 2.0, the Art of Coaching, and human-centered design principles. In addition, client engagement may improve if we focus on developing stronger partnerships with internal and external providers to enhance service provisions to clients, such as conducting warm hand-offs when connecting clients to other service providers.

Now post-pandemic and with the transition to the new CalSAWS system in July 2023, it is anticipated there may be a slight decrease to the Engagement Rate. As we adapt to the new system, new energy will be dedicated to interpreting and enhancing demographic data collection to assist in identifying trends for targeted improvement. The enhanced data will assist staff with having all the necessary information to access tools and resources available in the needed language when supporting clients towards

successful engagement. Offering services or connecting to resources in the current language during CalWORKs interactions should impact the clients ongoing participation and engagement.

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

Utilizing the feedback received from clients, staff, and partners and collaborators, the strategies identified are intended to improve the Engagement Rate within our program, which includes strategies focusing on staff, partner relationships, data collection, and service delivery to clients.

SMCWorks will work with the staff development team to develop annual training calendars to ensure staff receive the training necessary to remain current with best practices and tools to effectively work with clients. Training is intended to develop and enhance the staffs' skill sets when working with clients and can include a review of policies and protocols and/or data to inform best practices; engagement strategies; and/or peer facilitated learning sessions so they can learn from one another. There is also a commitment to continue reviewing and refining processes when conducting the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT) as SMCWorks staff reported feeling the OCAT was more deficit- than strength-based and requested training and/or further guidance on how to complete the OCAT assessments in a way that best meets the needs of the clients they serve.

Another strategy is to improve and/or strengths our partnerships with internal and external partners. SMCWorks relies on the Benefit Analysts (BAs) to refer clients to our WTW program. At times, the clients are not being referred timely or at all which may be due to BAs not being aware of the services and supports WTW provides. This is especially true as SMCWorks is in the process of developing the Linkages program in collaboration with SMC Children & Family Services (CFS) to support mutual CalWORKs WTW clients receiving child welfare services. In addition, SMCWorks is looking to expand its array of education and employment services via the Education and Work Study and the Subsidized Employment programs that can further support the clients' educational and/or employment interests. To support client participation and success, partnerships would be key.

During the CSA process, we learned that our demographic data information is limited, making it difficult to identify trends to focus on for targeted improvement. Improving our demographic data collection will allow us to understand and address the needs of our communities better. This includes our Spanish-speaking communities, which currently make up 10% of our WTW caseloads.

The feedback obtained from the focus groups and peer reviews assisted SMCWorks to identify strategies to increase clients' access to services. For example, we are currently in the process of overhauling and revising our current marketing and informational materials to ensure they meet the needs of clients by helping to reduce information overload for clients and to clearly highlight the WTW programs and services available. While strengthening our partnerships and increasing the use of warm handoffs between clients and SMCWorks staff and service providers, it is anticipated client engagement and connections will be further supported. Another strategy identified during our Peer

Review with Sonoma County is to develop a short overview video highlighting all the different services available for clients to assist in facilitation of a meaningful discussion related to a client's individual needs during the initial appointment with the Employment Services Specialist. The action steps identified will help improve the communication between the clients, the staff, and service providers and to connect the clients to needed services.

**3. Discuss any research or literature that supports the strategies chosen. Cite reference(s), if applicable.**

According to the "Improving Program Engagement of TANF Families: Understanding Participation and Those Reported Zero Hours of Participation in Work Activities OPRE Report 2015-06"

([https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/engagement\\_and\\_zero\\_hours\\_report\\_12\\_19\\_14.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/engagement_and_zero_hours_report_12_19_14.pdf), January 19, 2015), three service delivery and performance management factors were identified that appear to influence the number of families with reported zero hours of participation. The service delivery and performance management factors include: (1) ineffective assessment practices; (2) limited resources to provide work activities and address barriers; and (3) a focus on participation and employment outcome, not zero hour cases.

Ineffective assessment practices: In general, TANF programs that offer weak assessments might be at risk of having families with reported zero hours on their caseloads because the clients may be disinterested in the services assigned to them or they may have barriers to work that go unaddressed. However, the effective assessment process can have mixed effects on families with reported zero hours of participation. An effective assessment might be used to match clients to activities and services that increase their likelihood of engagement, decreasing the number of families with reported hours of participation. An effective assessment might also uncover clients' hidden barriers to employment and provide documentation for an exemption as well.

There were uncovered indicators that may determine the extent to which the assessment process influences families with reported zero hours of participation. There are three indicators below:

- Unstructured assessment and processes
- Large workloads that limited ongoing assessments
- Lack of easy access to specialized assessments

Limited resources to provide work activities and address barriers: Some of the factors affecting the families with no reported zero hours of participation might be the lack of employment services options and resources to address structural barriers or specialized service needs. Sites were often forced to think creatively about how to provide the best possible services with limited resources.

There were four indicators that may demonstrate the extent to which limited resources influenced the number of families with reported zero hours or participation:

- Narrowed range of work-based activities
- Limited resources for work support
- Workloads limited the possibility of individualized case management
- Lack of access to specialized services

This report summarized similar challenges that were reported out of the focus groups facilitated, which supports the strategies SMCWorks has identified to improve the Engagement Rate goal.

**4. Describe the roles of each partner and collaborator in implementing the selected strategies.**

The roles of partners and collaborators will be instrumental in supporting SMCWorks' efforts to implementing the strategies to improve the Engagement rates. This includes their assistance in ensuring the clients are aware of the program and services offered by SMC overall, as well as by SMCWorks. We want to strengthen our partnerships and enhance communication to ensure the clients are referred and connected to services timely. This may include developing and/or updating workflows and guides for staff to make certain clients are referred to an Employment Services Specialists right away after their CalWORKs case gets approved, which was consistent feedback received during our Peer Review process with Sonoma.

SMCWorks will continue to communicate with our partners and collaborators to obtain feedback to ensure that we are making progress in achieving the strategies identified.

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

SMCWorks will be working with the Staff Development team to identify training and/or policy/procedural needs of our staff that could help contribute to engagement rate improvement. The training needs identified currently include coaching, human centered design principles, CalWORKs 2.0, and ways to conduct the OCAT assessments to meet the needs of the clients served. In addition, San Mateo County just implemented the CalSAWS system in July 2023; therefore, staff will benefit from additional training to make sure they receive as much support and assistance needed as they continue to learn and use this new system.

In addition, given San Mateo County's small sample size resulting in difficulty in identifying trends, SMCWorks would like to request additional training and technical assistance from CDSS on improving its demographic data collection.

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

San Mateo County ES experienced decreased staffing during the pandemic related to natural attrition and due to a mandatory County hiring freeze. As such, ES leadership has been working to increase the SMCWorks staffing levels to support and deliver the full range of employment services to the communities. There are currently ongoing recruitments to hire additional Employment Services Specialists, Job Development

Specialists, and Community Workers, and SMCWorks wants to ensure they receive the proper training and access to resources to support the identified goals.

Currently, San Mateo County ES has experienced various hiring constraints, which have ranged from having a low qualified candidate pool available for the various job classifications to having several offers declined by candidates. San Mateo County ES is comprised of SMCWorks, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Service Connect programs. Although the programs have different clientele, the ESS, JDS, and community workers in each of the programs work in collaboration to provide support to clients as necessary.

San Mateo County ES is focused on working with clients to provide them with the necessary education and training, including supportive services so they can join a career path that leads to self-sufficiency. Clients have noted that mental health, domestic violence, and legal aid services have been barriers to employment and, although San Mateo County is a resource rich county, there are service capacity issues impacting our ability to connect clients to the full range of services needed. As such, SMCWorks is working to identify strategies for service provision, including whether establishing contracts with community-based organizations are feasible.

**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 SMC ES Management Analyst (MA) is our county's Cal-OAR main point of contact and will be taking the lead in oversight of the Cal-SIP, including the evaluation, progress, follow up, and compliance of the Cal-SIP strategies identified. The MA will identify leads for the action steps and will work with the team to determine timeframes for each strategy and action item, including projected deadlines and completion dates. The MA is also the liaison between San Mateo County and CDSS.

The MA is working with the team to establish ongoing check point meetings to discuss status of action items and to ensure consistent and regular communication is shared regarding progress and any noted improvements. The MA will develop a tracking tool with deadlines to monitor the progress, success and improvement needed to ensure that we are on track to meet our goal. Some action items may require a pilot or trial run to obtain feedback, assess and analyze the feedback, and update process as appropriate. We will continue to survey and solicit feedback from partners and clients regarding the targeted improvements for engagement.

## Section 2: Peer Review

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

Sonoma County

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

San Mateo County has identified Engagement Rate as a performance metric to be addressed in the Cal-SIP. Sonoma County staff provided a wealth of information on their business processes, programming, and services that inform SMC HSA's improvement efforts.

Peer review discussions with Sonoma County staff suggested their ability to link clients to needed services is tied at least in part to contracting directly with service providers that must prioritize the CalWORKs population. This reinforces previous observations in SMC that establishing contracts with additional community-based agencies would improve service delivery.

Several other possibilities for consideration were identified that could improve the transition from eligibility determination to engagement in Welfare to Work:

Completing the OCAT in the following stages to identify areas that need to be addressed quickly by a specialized unit or service providers:

- Exploring how CalSAWS might help with earlier identification of barriers;
- Developing an OCAT script that helps workers introduce the process as more of a consistent, strengths-based, and positive experience;
- Creating a new approach for discussing learning disabilities that leaves the option for declining the assessment but also stresses how the results can be advantageous; and
- Training workers on a regular basis for continuous quality improvement with client-facing interactions to improve engagement rates with clients.

The peer review process also identified challenges. For example, Sonoma County's model involves significant contributions from eligibility staff in the appraisal process. Implementing a similar model in SMC would be challenging without significant changes to training and staffing – the time required could have a negative effect on the timeliness and accuracy of eligibility determination.

Other challenges were identified as generally outside the CWDs' ability to address:

- The need for OCAT to better align with the tenets of CalWORKs 2.0
- Availability of OCAT in additional languages

Sonoma County's input regarding data collection - and the development of a flyer to encourage clients to respond to questions regarding race/ethnicity – was extremely insightful and is informing SMC HSA's SIP approach.

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

San Mateo County Employment Services contracted with Public Consulting Group (PCG) to assist in facilitating the peer review process as they also helped to facilitate the stakeholders focus groups on preparation for the CSA.

After submission of the CSA, San Mateo County reached out to our peer partners at Marin and Sonoma counties to gain their interest in assisting as our peer reviewers. Sonoma responded and was willing to collaborate for the Peer Review, to which we informed PCG to initiate the planning process.

We had two in-person meetings, one in SMC and one in Sonoma County, where each served as both host and peer county to review each other's CSA reports and to discuss best practices for improvement. Prior to each meeting, each county developed an agenda based on the example given by CDSS in the Peer Review toolkit.

SMC hosted an in-person, 1-day, peer review session with Sonoma County DHS on June 1st, 2023. Planning for the event was initiated in April with the development of a draft agenda with support from PCG. Sonoma County was selected due to its relative similarity in size, client demographics, and economic conditions.

The agenda for the peer review session included an overview of SMC's organizational structure and CalWORKs business processes, a tour of SMC HSA's office and the central region Resource Center, a review of SMC's CSA, and a discussion of proposed strategies for improvement with feedback from session participants. Sonoma County was represented by a Program Planning and Evaluation Analyst, an Employment and Training Program Coordinator, and a Senior Employment and Training Specialist. Attendees from SMC included the SMCWorks Program Manager, an Employment Services Management Analyst, three SMCWorks Human Services Supervisors, a Job Development Specialist, two Employment Services Specialists, and an Economic Self-Sufficiency Human Services Supervisor.

SMC HSA was the "guest" peer the following week in Sonoma County where select staff participated in reviewing Sonoma County's CSA and processes and providing feedback.

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

The peer review discussion centered on three areas that SMC ES is exploring to improve Engagement Rate: 1) the OCAT/Appraisal process, 2) processes for barrier removal, support service, and activity referrals, and 3) methods for collecting demographic data.

A key component of the effort to improve Engagement Rate is the need to move clients more seamlessly from eligibility determination to WTW engagement and better align the



OCAT interview with the tenets of CalWORKs 2.0. By doing so it is anticipated that engagement in activities will improve.

With respect to the OCAT/Appraisal process, Sonoma County described the more prominent role that eligibility staff play in orienting clients to the program compared to the model in SMC. First, the county presents a combined CalWORKs/WTW Orientation video before the in-person eligibility intake appointment (which is on site unless the client is unable to attend in person). Then, parts of the OCAT are conducted before cash aid is approved by eligibility staff. The total time allotted for this intake process is approximately 3 ½ hours.

The results of the OCAT are then sent to WTW counselors to inform the approach for the assessment appointment, which is typically ~ 1 week after the intake appointment. If feasible, the assessment appointment can include representatives from service providers (e.g., an on-site domestic violence counselor if the OCAT identified that need). This process supports an in-person handoff and illustrates the advantages of contracting with service providers who are co-located in the CalWORKs offices rather than relying on an agency that does not have to prioritize CalWORKs participants. They reported it was easier and more effective to refer and connect the clients when services are available at the same site than to send the client to a different site/location for services.

The topic of the OCAT produced informative discussions, including the challenge of focusing on a client's strengths when the OCAT is generally viewed as a deficit-based and, relatedly, that it does not closely align with the tenets of CalWORKs 2.0.

The ability to connect with and engage clients living in remote areas is an identified issue in both counties, and Sonoma County has implemented two solutions to address the problem – 1) Zoom meetings for remote appraisals (and service provision if needed) and 2) home visits by workers (both eligibility and WTW case management).

The discussion of referrals reflected some similarity in the challenges faced by the peer counties with respect to capacity of service providers.

- Sonoma County currently has a three month wait for mental health services despite a relatively seamless referral process and has also had to pause their home visiting program due to the resignation of all the program's nurses over the past several months.
- Language barriers are a challenge – Sonoma County indicated they are well equipped for English and Spanish-language clients but are challenged when clients speak other languages (e.g., Russian).

Pertaining to the demographic data collection, Sonoma County provided meaningful insight on the challenges created because race/ethnicity is an optional field for data entry. In response to this issue, Sonoma County has developed a flyer that explains why the county is asking the question about race/ethnicity. The county's racial equity

workgroup created the document - which has had a good response from clients - decreasing the frequency that they decline to respond. Improved data collection in this area is expected to support creation and delivery of more culturally appropriate activities and services.

During the peer review discussion, several topics elicited meaningful conversations:

- The degree that CalSAWS implementation is a barrier to completing other initiatives, including those related to Cal-OAR;
- The challenges inherent to the extensive use of telework since the pandemic, particularly regarding recent hires that have not had the opportunity to listen and see how their peers are doing their jobs; and
- The need for succession planning and the importance of coaching new staff so they feel like they can advance professionally (Sonoma County has a mentorship program, while SMC would like to start one).

The peer review session also included questions from Sonoma County regarding SMC's caseload, characteristics, staff training requirements, post-aid/job retention services offered, availability of car repair services, sanction policies, subsidized employment programs, and call center wait times. Sonoma County was also interested in SMC's Community Information Handbook, which Sonoma County hopes to create with a focus on WTW information. These items will be discussed more in-depth when SMC takes part in the peer review session hosted by Sonoma County and in future months as warranted.

Prioritization of improvement strategies is a key action item resulting from the peer review. Multiple ideas were shared and, although SMC would like to implement as much as is reasonable, resources (both staff time and program budget) are limited.

## Section 3: Target Measure Summary

**Goal 1:** Increase Engagement Rate to 20% from 12%. Review using Cal-OAR data dashboard, county ad hoc reports, individual-level, and disaggregated data improving by 2.0% every 6 months within 2 years.

**Performance Measure:** Engagement Rate

**Baseline Result:** 12%

<b>Cal-SIP Start</b>	<b>Progress Report #1:</b>	<b>Progress Report #2:</b>	<b>Cycle End Date:</b>
Time: 12/1/2023	12/6/2024	1/9/2026	6/30/2026

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

**Strategy 1:** Develop annual training calendar to ensure staff stay up to date with the most current best practices when providing services to clients.

Action 1: Provide staff with training on coaching (e.g., Art of Coaching), human centered design principles, and CalWORKs 2.0 to enhance engagement efforts with clients.

Action 2: Conduct quarterly all staff meetings to share data trends; acknowledge successes; discuss strategies and/or best practices; and/or to facilitate cross-trainings.

Action 3: Provide staff resources and information on diversity, racial, social equity, inclusion, and belongingness to be able to serve our clients successfully.

**Strategy 2:** Improve partnerships with internal and external partners to support client participation and success.

Action 1: Identify and train Employment Services point of contact liaisons to partner with other inter-departmental staff to market employment services.

Action 2: Conduct regularly scheduled staff meetings with other internal partners to identify strategies to enhance communication between Employment Services and internal partners to facilitate the transition from applying to receive benefits and services.

Action 3: Work with internal partners to improve notification and timely referrals to SMCWorks when families are eligible for CalWORKs WTW Services.

Action 4: Job Development Specialists and Employment Services Specialists to identify and develop additional certificate training programs that meet clients' career field interests.

Action 5: Job Development Specialists to identify and develop subsidized employment contracts with employers that could further support clients' employment.

**Strategy 3:** Improve demographic data collection to enhance understanding of underserved populations and identify tools to measure success of efforts to address unmet needs.

Action 1: Collaborate with community partners, including CDSS to improve demographic data collection and information and enhance knowledge of CalSAWS reporting system to improve data collection.

Action 2: Develop informational materials to inform and educate clients about the importance of answering questions regarding race and ethnicity.

Action 3: Hold a specific outreach dedicated to unengaged Asian and Hispanic clients for a better understanding of barrier service needs, since they consistently have the lowest engagement rate in San Mateo County.

Action 4: Review disaggregated data to determine underlying trends and subpopulations for focused outreach.

Action 5: Collect family success stories with the community, staff, and/or partners and collaborators to demonstrate the impact of CalWORKs throughout the communities.

**Strategy 4:** Increase clients' access to services.

Action 1: Increase the use of warm handoffs between SMCWorks staff and service providers to support client engagement and connection to resources/services.

Action 2: Develop orientation videos that clients can watch prior to their initial appointments with Employment Services Specialists.

Action 3: Develop marketing materials introducing Employment Services to be sent to the client prior to orientation appointment.

Action 4: Develop a plan for clients to access workshop information in Spanish either in a group or one-on-one setting.

Action 5: Research the feasibility of developing contracts with community-based organizations to prioritize WTW clients for services to help alleviate barriers to client success.

**Strategy 5:** Refine process and guidance when conducting the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT) and using OCAT results in the initial meeting.

Action 1: Create guides and/or scripts for staff to use when conducting the OCAT interviews.

Action 2: Create a brief questionnaire highlighting the main questions in the OCAT for client to complete prior to the appointment to the ESS to be better prepared during initial meeting with client.

Action 3: Improve the process using OCAT results to help families set goals and identify resources to support families.

Action 4: Improve the data collection for OCAT by creating a process and standard for staff.

*Tracking:* The SMC ES Management Analyst (MA) is our county's Cal-OAR main point of contact and will be taking the lead in oversight of the Cal-SIP, including the evaluation, progress, follow up, and compliance of the Cal-SIP strategies identified. The MA will identify leads for the action steps and will work with the team to determine timeframes for each strategy and action item, including projected deadlines and completion dates. The MA is also the liaison between San Mateo County and CDSS.

The MA is working with the team to establish ongoing check point meetings to discuss status of action items and to ensure consistent and regular communication is shared regarding progress and any noted improvements. The MA will develop a tracking tool with deadlines to monitor the progress, success and improvement needed to ensure that we are on track to meet our goal. Some action items may require a pilot or trial run to obtain feedback, assess and analyze the feedback, and update process as appropriate. We will continue to survey and solicit feedback from partners and clients regarding the targeted improvements for engagement.

## Appendix

Appendix is intended to include additional information not already captured within the Cal-SIP Report.

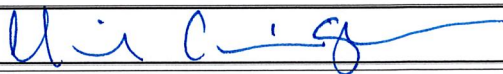
**Appendix A: Cal-OAR Signature Sheet:** The Cal-SIP must be approved by the CWDs County Board of Supervisors in public session, or as applicable by the chief elected official.

**Appendix B: Cal-OAR Team and Partner & Collaborators.** Details the Cal-OAR team and partners engaged in the Cal-SIP process.

**Appendix C: Supporting Information.** Includes charts, graphics, and other material that is referenced throughout the Cal-SIP.

## CAL-OAR REPORT SIGNATURE

For submittal of:  Cal-CSA  Cal-SIP  Cal-SIP Progress Report

<b>County</b>	San Mateo County
<b>Submission Date</b>	11/02/2023
<b>Cal-CQI Cycle</b>	2021-2026 Cycle
<b>County Welfare Director</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Claire Cunningham
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Phone Number</b>	650-802-7555
<b>Board of Supervisors (BOS) Representative Signature – For Cal-SIP Approval Only</b>	
<b>BOS Approval Date</b>	
<b>Name</b>	
<b>Title/Position</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	

### Contact Information

<b>County Cal-OAR Contact</b>	<b>Name and Title</b>	Nikki Sajise/Employment Services Management Analyst
	<b>Phone &amp; E-mail</b>	(650) 802-5193/nsajise@smcgov.org

**Sign, scan, and submit the Signature Sheet along with the Cal-OAR Report to your county's SFT site.**







**Appendix B: Cal-OAR Team and Partners and Collaborators**

<b>County Cal-OAR Team Members</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Level of Participation/Description</b>
Lesley Randolph	Human Services Supervisor	Participated from Program Perspective and Peer Review
Alicia Rodriguez	Human Services Supervisor	Participated in data validation
Elden Ostrea	Human Services Analyst II	Participated in data validation
Cindy Antezana	Human Services Policy Analyst	Participated from Policy Perspective
Tenaya Cannon	Human Services Supervisor	Participated in the Peer Review from Eligibility Perspective
Maria Gasca-Armas	Employment Services Specialist II	Participated in the Peer Review from Program Perspective
Sam Wang	Employment Services Specialist II	Participated in the Peer Review from Program Perspective
Katherine Penagos	Employment Services Specialist II	Participated in the Peer Review from Program Perspective