



Fostering TANF/WIOA Collaboration *Sustainability in Action: The Tulare County Story*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Communication has been key to the success of Tulare County's TANF/WIOA collaboration. Meet-and-greet events help open those lines of communication between TANF and WIOA staff.
- The reverse referral process established during the COVID-19 pandemic creates a "no wrong door" approach for customers and simplifies their experience.



OVERVIEW

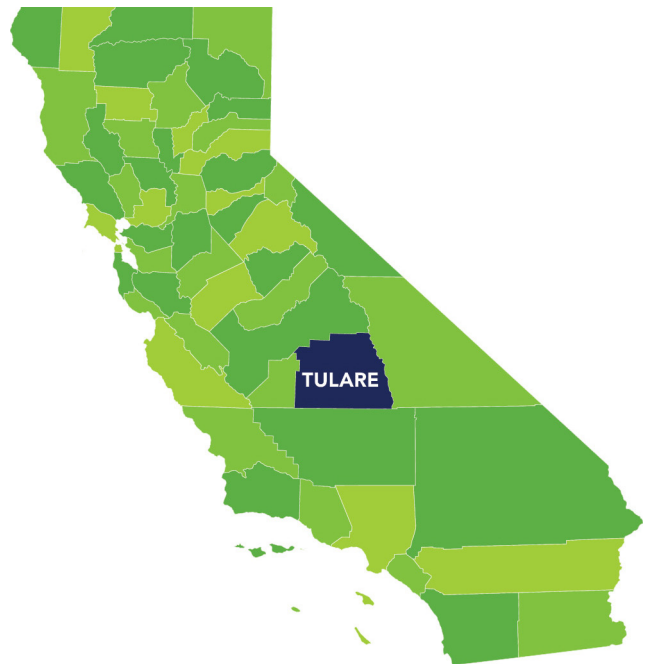
Since 2014, states have embarked on coordination between Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs and the workforce system to improve service delivery and reduce duplication. The passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014 served as a catalyst for many state TANF and workforce system leaders to coordinate client services serving low-income or vulnerable populations. In 2018 and 2019, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance (OFA), developed a [series of briefs on TANF/WIOA collaboration](#) designed to highlight innovative coordination strategies between TANF and WIOA programs.

In 2022, OFA conducted an update of five collaborative efforts to share best practices around how the collaboration has sustained through time and evolved as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to include [Tulare County, California](#). This brief provides an update to the successful TANF and WIOA Collaboration in [Tulare County, California](#).



BACKGROUND

Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency (HHSA) and the Workforce Investment Board of Tulare County (WIB) officially work together to provide services to low-income customers. HHSA provides employment services to participants of California's TANF program (called CalWORKs), as well as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment & Training (E&T) participants. The WIB provides WIOA basic and individualized career services and training at two comprehensive Employment Connection job centers and two affiliate centers. Joint enrollment and shared resources allow HHSA staff to use CalWORKs systems to identify customer barriers, get customers work-ready, and set goals with customers. HHSA can then refer customers to the WIB to receive additional services that they might not have known about otherwise.



The collaboration between the two programs was productive even before it became official, and both entities reported the WIOA legislation mandate simply allowed their programs to grow and blossom in a way that was not always feasible before, such as by utilizing shared funding streams. Staff on both sides cited open communication between the two entities as the primary reason for success. Prior to the pandemic, the TANF and WIOA teams communicated primarily through phone and email, but relied on a case management form accessed by both teams to keep track of case manager notes, input status updates, change of circumstances, requests, etc. Staff talked through strategies and goals, as well as coordinated to address challenges. TANF and WIOA teams met both quarterly and for periodic check-ins; however, that regularity has slowed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data sharing systems also streamlined information as HHSA shares a spreadsheet with the CalWORKs policy team to share information about clients and funding. In the past, both teams also engaged in cross-training in the form of 15-minute training videos. These have slowed during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the plan is to reinstate them when possible.



COVID-19 MANAGEMENT

Despite the challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, Tulare County's collaboration persevered. The pandemic and recent wildfires in the area presented many

challenges for the county and its collaboration. The constant and open communication between the entities slowed.

Staffing shortages during the pandemic restricted services, and applicant shortages exacerbated the issue. Taking all that in stride, Tulare County seamlessly transitioned into a virtual work environment, and virtual services were offered by both the WIB and HHSA to continue to meet customer needs. The virtual services included interviews, tele-coaching, virtual orientations, and phone check-ins.

Tulare County also offered flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic, where regulations were relaxed, sanctions were dropped, and services that were required to be held in-person became hybrid or virtual. Lastly, the pandemic inspired Tulare County's successful Reverse Referral Process. Under this system, Employment Connections can recruit and identify individuals who might be eligible for additional public assistance services and refer them to HHSA. The process maximizes the number of referrals coming through and is a way for both parties to serve customers. The "no wrong door" approach allows Employment Center staff to identify individuals eligible for HHSA services and refer them over to HHSA, which

“ With the reverse referral, we just confirm them through our system at HHSA. It's a “no wrong door” approach.
–ROXANNA CRUZ, DIVISION MANAGER OF TulareWORKS

in turn, will refer them back to the WIB for employment services. Many staff on both sides have expressed gratitude for this new strategy and find it helps streamline the process.

Currently, Tulare County works hard to regain its strong communication and return to pre-pandemic collaboration. The benefits of the flexibility offered to customers during the COVID-19 pandemic have prompted Tulare County to continue to be flexible as much as possible. The flexibility in how services are delivered and interactions with customers have become beneficial for both staff and customers, especially given day care closures and ratio limits that affect them all. Additionally, due to the positivity of the reverse referral process, it continues to remain in place.



COLLABORATION SUSTAINABILITY

While communications for Tulare County declined in general with staff shortages and pressing demands caused by the pandemic, communication remains key to a successful partnership. The team is ramping back up that communication and shared learning with the addition of in-person events, such as meet-and-greets for the Expanded Subsidized Employment (ESE) program at HHSA district offices. WIOA ESE staff work with the CalWORKs supervisors at each district office to schedule these meet-and-greet visits. During these meetings, ESE staff introduce themselves, present the services offered (ESE, WIOA Title I, and other partner agency services at the Employment Connection), and provide details about the referral process and required forms. All attendees receive informational fliers, and questions are answered. These meetings provide a unique opportunity for new CalWORKs staff to connect and learn about the ESE program and services.

Additionally, staff from both sides have noticed that more referrals are made when staff are present for these in-person orientations. One recommendation was to set quarterly collaboration meetings, and to be clear about who to contact for what purposes on the phone. The reverse referral process created during the COVID-19 pandemic has also strengthened their collaboration.



COLLABORATIVE IMPACT

Through its collaboration, Tulare County has seen a high rate of participant success, where customers can transition from public assistance and gain sustainable employment. There are many success stories of how the services that HHSA and the WIB provided supported upward mobility by promoting economic security and allowing individuals to transition off public assistance. For example, they have helped single parents who were living in their cars not just get a job but gain meaningful employment that supported them enough to obtain stable housing on their own.

Tulare County's positive relationships and open communication also provide its customers with a seamless transition into work programs. Employers report positive feedback about receiving more high-quality referrals that have the necessary support from public assistance to succeed in their work environment.

WIB coordinators work to develop strong relationships with employers, so they know what to look for in participants. Through these relationships, a trust is built, and a partnership is formed that helps facilitate better connections and streamline the process alleviating the employers from the burdens of interviewing and hiring. Information and successes are often shared between the WIB and employer agency after placement. In instances where an individual may have a challenge, employers are empowered to reach out to the coordinators who can assist them immediately. In many cases, these customer referrals turn into reliable employment and even long-standing careers.

SUCCESS STORY



“ A woman is now a courtroom clerk making \$55K/year that started as an intern at the Tulare County Superior Courts. When she first started, she didn't have many clerical skills, and may have come from the fast food industry. Now she is the judge's right hand. This is an awesome thing.

–**MARTHA GAINES,**
HUMAN RESOURCES SPECIALIST,
TULARE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT



SPECIAL FOCUS

FOSTERING INNOVATION

Background

COVID-19 restrictions, health concerns, and the fast-paced nature of the program makes it difficult to buy clothing and other work necessities with clients in a timely manner.

Extended low client numbers since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staffing shortages at HHSA offices.

Innovation

TulareWORKs is looking to develop a stipend system so that new clients can access necessities, such as interview clothing, without having to wait on HHSA availability. This will provide more flexibility for customers and ensure they are prepared for work prior to meeting with the WIB career coach.

The Tulare County Reverse Referral Process or “no wrong door” strategy allows both offices to refer to one another and preemptively seek out and contact possible clients that are eligible for services.

WIB staff place job-ready clients in needed administrative office roles at HHSA as a type of training opportunity. This relieves the burden for both teams and allows clients to gain experience prior to obtaining a more permanent work position while continuing to receive services.

TANF SNAPSHOT



Management Information System Name:

CalSAWS effective 2/27/23



STATE DEPARTMENT

California Department of Social Services (CDSS) within the California Health and Human Services Agency

TANF Cash Assistance is called:
California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs)

\$1,507* Max Monthly Earnings for Single Parent/2 Kids



\$878** Max Monthly TANF Cash Benefit for Single Parent/2 Kids

AVERAGE NUMBER OF RECIPIENTS PER MONTH FY2021



606,783
Adults and Children



145,372
Adults



461,411
Children

\$3,434,917,017 Federal TANF Expenditures FY 2020

*But varies within the state this is the amount that applies to the majority of the state.
**Differs though based on Region (this number is for the most populous region).

WIOA SNAPSHOT



Management Information System:

CalJOBS

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE (WAGNER-PEYSER) FEDERAL APPROPRIATION



\$82,214,927
Program Year (PY) 2022



One-Stop Job Center:
America's Job Centers of California (AJCCs)



WIOA ADULT FEDERAL APPROPRIATION ALLOTMENT

\$136,107,910
Program Year (PY) 2022



WIOA YOUTH FEDERAL APPROPRIATION



\$141,613,074
Program Year (PY) 2022



STATE DEPARTMENTS

California Employment Development (EDD)

Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Worker (Title I) and Employment Service/Wagner-Peyser (Title III)

California Department of Education (CDE) Adult Education and Family Literacy (Title II) California

Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) Vocational Rehabilitation (as amended by Title IV)

WIOA DISLOCATED WORKER FEDERAL APPROPRIATION



\$172,716,686
Program Year (PY) 2022



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