

Linkages Assessment & Planning Lessons Learned

Leadership is Key

Leadership of both CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services need to support the development of a work plan and empower the Linkages Coordinators to use this plan to keep implementation on track.

Stay the Course

Use your work plan as a tool to monitor that progress is being made, the team is on track for getting Linkages launched and the focus is on action, rather than getting stuck in an endless planning process.

Work Planning with a Purpose

Use the plan to set agendas for meetings, staying accountable to tasks assigned, adjust timelines as needed while staying aggressive to get Linkages on the ground as soon as possible.

Plan with the End in Mind

Ensure the work plan identifies an overall implementation goal (e.g., "begin serving mutual FM/CalWORKs families in the South County", "expand Linkages countywide", "extend Linkages to serve FR/CalWORKs mutual families") and orient all work plan tasks, products and timelines to accomplish that goal.

Set Aggressive Deadlines

Getting Linkages up and running as soon as possible helps avoid "analysis paralysis". Imperfections will be the foundation for later change, so build on these to improve the program as it naturally evolves.

Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Use this toolkit to find and adapt examples from other counties that have successfully put Linkages into place. Leverage the tested techniques, strategies and "lessons learned" from counties who are serving the same target population for Linkages and have a similar CWS and CalWORKs infrastructure.

Celebrate Your Success

Publicize early "wins" to keep implementation momentum going and build staff buy-in. Staff can be motivated by hearing how one of their colleagues was able to make a difference for a family or how case management was made easier through the Linkages collaboration.

Communicate Early and Often

The Linkages Coordinator is the cheerleader and communications officer for the Linkages Project. A visible presence and fearless need to involve and inform others will serve the coordinator well, as he/she coordinates partnerships at all levels.

Build Coaching Capacity

Provide multiple opportunities for CalWORKs and CWS staff to cross traditional boundaries and work together. Those less experienced at coordinated services need access to someone who has "been there and done that" to gain insight, moral support and perspective. Consider soliciting volunteers from pilot locations to coach and mentor units that are just starting out.

Appreciate the "Implementation Dip"

A dip in performance and confidence is common within the first year of a new initiative as people are expected to demonstrate new skills and new ways of behaving. During this time people feel anxious, fearful, confused and overwhelmed. In fact, some may prefer to do the old "wrong" thing competently, rather than the new "right" thing incompetently. Expect this and pay attention to people. Focus on building emotional connections, cultivating relationships and healing rifts. Invest in developing the team's capacity to make the changes happen and continue to convey enthusiasm, optimism and clarity of vision to keep people going.