

KEEPING LINKED

Linkages Evaluation Plan

The Linkages Project is a collaboration between CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services (CWS) to create a continuum of services, supports, and resources to promote child and family wellbeing. Over the past two decades, the Child and Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC) has worked with both the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and counties to support the implementation of Linkages programs across California ([to learn more visit this link](#)). The current phase of Linkages officially began in 2022 with CFPIC to oversee work to build on past efforts and institute a new framework for Linkages. This new phase aligns with the Office of Child Abuse Prevention's (OCAP) Framework for Preventing Child Abuse by the Promotion of Healthy Families and Communities, characterized as Primary, Secondary and Tertiary interventions and represents a continuum of approaches to coordination embraced by counties across California ([to learn more visit this link](#)).

To support this new phase of the Linkages Project, an impetus for the evaluation of the continuum of Linkages approaches was to understand the variances in processes that go behind implementing the program and gauge its effectiveness as a collaborative. Very often counties are tasked with implementing programs without a keen eye of understanding of what works and what doesn't to improve practice and setting the stage for sustainability and funding. Toward this end, CFPIC is partnering with RDA Consulting (RDA) to lead an evaluation planning process and conduct annual evaluations of current linkages services over a two-year period. CFPIC approached RDA for this work due to their experience designing and

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Enhanced Family Engagement

Linkages: It's How We Do Business

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conducting evaluations for child welfare and CalWORKs programs at both the state and county level.

Counties were made aware of the upcoming evaluation at the Linkages Convening in November, 2022 where county selection criteria and sample evaluation questions were put forth. Based on county interest evinced at the convening, CFPIC and RDA generated a shortlist of six interested counties and requested counties to complete an Evaluation Capacity Diagnostic Tool. This tool is designed to help organizations assess their readiness to take on many types of evaluation activities. It captures information on, a) organizational context such as the organizational culture and practice around evaluation; using data to inform ongoing work, and b) evaluation skills of staff such as existing evaluation knowledge and experience; defining benchmarks and indicators. Using the Evaluation Capacity Diagnostic Tool, CFPIC and RDA scheduled meetings with counties to provide more detailed information around county participation expectations in the evaluation process. RDA provided an overview of what county participation would look like in terms of identifying a county evaluation point person as well as the overall timeline, reporting and technical assistance that would be provided. The counties that agreed to participate in the evaluation include Orange, Riverside and Sonoma.

The official launch of the county Evaluation was held on April 17th with the first "assignment" is for the counties to bring back to the May meeting their Theory of Change and Logic Model. Material and templates from the Annual Convening's Evaluation Innovation Session was shared to assist in the assignment. This is an important part of the Evaluation Plan as it will assist in the understanding of the activities that are part of each county's Linkages strategy.

Evaluation Overview & Method

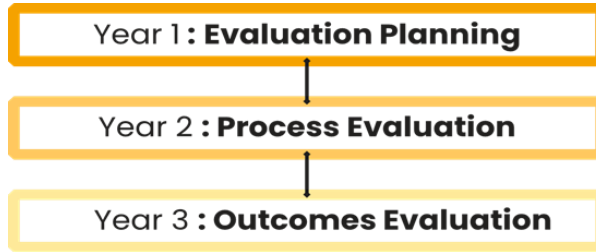
The purpose of the 2022-2025 Linkages Evaluation is to assess the implementation and impact of the Linkages Program at the secondary and tertiary levels of prevention. To this end, RDA will conduct a mixed method process and outcome evaluation using a pre-post design. This approach incorporates quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to provide a comprehensive assessment of the program implementation and effects. It was selected to maximize validity and provides different perspectives on complex, multi-dimensional issues. The quantitative data analysis will explore measures of program engagement and service delivery, as well as program completion, individual and family outcomes, and subsequent involvement with the child welfare system. Qualitative data analysis will provide insight into the referral, enrollment, and service delivery process and the internal and external factors that affect the fidelity of implementation. Qualitative data will also explore participants'

perspectives on service delivery, including ease of and barriers to program enrollment and participation.

Timeline

The Linkages Evaluation will be carried out over three phases between 2022 -2025

- Phase 1 (Year 1, Nov 2022 to August 2023): Evaluation Planning to generate an evaluation design process
- Phase 2 (Year 2, Sept 2023 to June 2024): Process Evaluation focused on understanding program implementing
- Phase 3 (Year 3, July 2024 to June, 2025): Outcomes Evaluation focused on assessing outcomes and impacts



Linkages Guidelines for Enhancing Family Engagement: Through the CalWORKs & Child Welfare Partnership

A big thanks to the Linkages Tertiary Workgroup, under the leadership of Leslie Ann Hay, for updating the Linkages Guidelines that was originally developed during the earlier iteration of Linkages. The Workgroup included staff from CDSS and Counties:

CDSS: Emily Hering, Jess Zayas, Johnny Cuesta, Lesley Tejada, Lisa Witchey, Rebecca Buchmiller, Turid Gregory Furlong

Counties: Adam Tipp, Barbara Crespo, Colleen Ridlon, Maithanh Nguyen, Mari Solis, Nicole Mastin, Polly Dagmy

The purpose of the publication is to guide CalWORKs (CW) & Child Welfare (CWS) staff in their collaborative practice with families. But it does much more than that. The Guidelines document describes the transformation from Linkages to Linkages 2.0, including the movement to a Prevention framework - Primary, Secondary and Tertiary. It also highlights how the evolution in both CalWORKs and Child Welfare fits nicely into the Linkages Collaboration framework, with CalWORKs 2.0 resulting in a focus on family engagement and Child Welfare's Core Practice Model promoting teaming and engagement.



Linkages Guidelines for Enhancing Family Engagement

through the CalWORKs & Child Welfare Partnership



Examples of engagement around Linkages Practices:

- Reducing Barriers for Parents - CalWORKs case managers can help engage parents specifically by provision of barrier removal services
- Coordinating Case Planning - when families are open to both CW/Welfare to Work (WtW) and CWS they can receive services, supports and timelines that are aligned
- Joint On-going Monitoring: with continued joint monitoring, parents are more likely to communicate with their team about obstacles or accomplishments along the way.

Evidence* shows that engaged families are more likely to collaborate and cooperate with care plans, choose services or treatments they feel will help them & follow through with services and make life changes.

*Dawson, K & Berry, M (2002) Engaging families in child welfare services: An evidence based approach to best practice. Child Welfare, 81 (2), 293-317.

The Guidelines are divided into six (6) domains: Engagement, Assessment, Service Planning & Delivery, Coordination and Care Management, Monitoring and Adapting, Transition and After Care. In each section you will find guidelines and practice tips to promote coordination and collaboration for mutually served families from both CW and CWS. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) will be sending an All County Information Notice with a link to the Guidelines on the CFPIC website. You can also access the Guidelines by clicking [here](#).

Linkages- The Way We Do Business

The Linkages Project was fully implemented in Los Angeles County in 2009 and focused primarily on the coordination of case plans and services for families who are mutually served by CalWORKs and Child Welfare Services or in LA County, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

The LA County Linkages Partnership was innovative in their development and implementation of protocols that address and support mutual families. Current Linkages protocols include; the DCFS 5122 Referral for DCFS staff to screen families and individuals for potential aid programs; the Collocation of Linkages GAIN Social Workers (LGSWs) at all DCFS offices to provide DPSS expertise in Child and Family Team (CFT) Meetings; Family Preservation Services for mutual families in CalWORKs and DCFS; Family Reunification Services for former CalWORKs participants; and Sanction and Homeless Protocols to ensure mutual families with these barriers are assisted and connected to resources in a timely manner. Throughout the years, LA has sustained Linkages and incorporated service coordination for mutual families into "The way we do business."

Since February 2020, the LA Linkages Team, made up of DPSS and DCFS Linkages Coordinators and Program Support, participated in monthly meetings with

California Department of Social Services, the Child and Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC), County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) and other Counties. Through the meetings, a framework was developed for the new iteration of Linkages which is guided by the framework of child maltreatment prevention: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary strategies. This framework is called Linkages 2.0.

In 2022, CFPIC announced the relaunch of the CalWORKs and Child Welfare collaboration initiative, known as Linkages 2.0. To align LA Linkages with the state's framework the Linkages Partnership is expanding its efforts to assist more families by implementing an additional protocol, Family Maintenance for mutual families not in Family Preservation. This protocol is intended to capture the largest population of mutual families not currently identified for Linkages services. DCFS is also pursuing prevention and early intervention strategies through proposals for efforts in identifying potential Linkages families with service needs before they have DCFS involvement.

The Child and Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC) invited all California counties to attend the statewide Linkages convening From November 30 - December 2, 2022, in Sacramento, CA. Of the 58 counties, 32 existing and new Linkages counties sent approximately 150 representatives. The LA County Linkages Team was represented by staff from DPSS and DCFS. It was an exciting time to reunite with the original founders of the statewide Linkages Initiative, CFPIC, and "put a face to the name" of those county partners who have been meeting together virtually over the course of the previous two years.



The LA Linkages Team, along with the Orange and Riverside County panelists presented a workshop, *What's In It For Me: Communicating Linkages to Staff and Stakeholders*. Workshop attendees learned about the communication strategies and techniques the panelists use to share Linkages in their counties. Orange County presented a video they share with their staff, and Riverside County implemented a Road Show that incorporates a creative flyer explaining the services and resources available to their mutual families.

The LA Team trio of Gloria Rojas-Jakini, Hilda Sanchez, and David Yada, DCFS, provided a background of the

Linkages Partnership, its development, and implementation countywide from; "the Beginning, to Where we are now, to Where we're Going." The Team demonstrated what LA has experienced over time and what the Partnership continues doing to successfully sustain Linkages and now, how we plan to grow. The continued communication strategies and principles behind them are the motivators for the ongoing sustainability and expansion of Linkages.

The Keynote Presentation: *Economic and Concrete Supports: Preventing Child Welfare Involvement and Strengthening Families* by Clare Anderson, MSW, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, was eye opening and reinforced what is well known about the correlation between poverty and child maltreatment. Of importance, she mentioned, "nearly 85% of families investigated for child neglect earn below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level." Decreased access to economic and concrete supports leads to increased child maltreatment. This resonated with staff and reinforced the foundations of

Linkages Partnership. It is critical to understand the work performed by the Linkages staff has lifelong implications for the families we serve.

With the guidance and support of CFPIC and our Department Heads, Dr. Contreras, and Mr. Nichols, the LA Linkages Partnership is confident in the strong collaboration we have with your DHCS partner.

Upcoming Events

**PEER SHARING CONVERSATIONS: CALWORKS 2.0 AND LINKAGES 2.0—
HOW DO THEY FIT TOGETHER?, FLEXIBLE FUNDING, HOME VISITING
AND LINKAGES**

May 18 from 10:00–11:30 AM

[Register Here!](#)

Mark Your
Calendars!



If you have any suggestions or contributions for the next newsletter, let us know! Email Danna Fabella at danna.fabella@cfpic.org.