



Heatwave of Ideas

8/6/2026

Program Evaluation: Breakout

1. Round 1 Topic: Program Evaluation

NOTES: In thinking about program evaluation, round 1 counties identified that they were doing some informal looking at outcomes focused on reunification rates for families that were involved in CalWORKs FR Cash Aid. Other counties were not in a place in their linkages implementation where they felt like they were ready to do evaluation, but we shared the [Linkages Evaluation Toolkit](#) and the [Linkages Program Evaluation](#) that was completed in 2025.

One participant was a line staff worker, and we talked about the possibility of sharing program evaluation tools with his supervisor and championing the idea of evaluation. We also discussed the importance of evaluation in a time of tightening resources to show the value of the Linkages collaboration.

We discussed forms of evaluation beyond outcome evaluation and including surveys for service recipient participants or developmental evaluation in terms of evaluating where you are in the process of implementing your linkages program, how it is going and what you could do differently.

Two of the counties identified that they have recently revamped and relaunched their linkages. One county felt that there was not as much participation as they had hoped, so they took a step back, reviewed some things, relaunched, and now are having a better experience with the relaunch. We talked about how that was a form of evaluation, because they took a look at what they were doing, identified how to do things differently, and are now seeing a different result that they like better. They've also identified some areas where they want to continue to grow.

Another county also talked about how they had revamped their program. They are thinking about evaluation, but they're really in a kind of a visioning stage of what they want their revamped linkages to look like.

2. Round 2 Topic: Program Evaluation

NOTES: We heard more from one of the counties that had launched, pulled back, and then relaunched. One of the things that they did differently was to make a video. The video included leadership from different levels talking about the importance of Linkages. They also revamped some of their training materials to include that video at the start of every training. They use the training materials from the CFPIC website, but they start the training with their video and then they have tailored the standardized training so that it makes sense for their county and the way their county implements things. They felt that joint training and helping all parties understand more about what each program does and the value of the resources they bring to the Linkages collaboration has been successful, and they feel like this has made a difference. They identified that doing the video served to help build relationships and show the importance of leadership collaboration, setting the stage for collaboration across all staff.

We heard from the other county that had been revamping and they pointed out that they have a new manager, who is very interested in lifting up Linkages. That's a promising sign in terms of a next step for program evaluation to make sure what they're doing is working. They're just not there yet.

3. Round 3 Topic: Program Evaluation

NOTES: We talked a little bit about other things the county that had relaunched and done the training could look at to further increase the number of families that are participating. One idea was to do a service recipient survey at the end of the time working with the family to identify how they could improve the service that families receive. One of the barriers that they're facing is that families have to agree to participate in Linkages. Learning what has worked well for families might help them think about how to better explain the benefits of Linkages when they share information about the program.

We talked a little bit about their mutual family identification process. That allows them to compare caseloads in CalWORKs and child welfare and identify families that are mutual. They then attend CFTM, and that's the point where they talk to the family and share the value of the Linkages program and get ROIs signed for the family to participate. A participant survey would be a great next step for them.

Another county also shared their process that includes a warm handoff to the Linkages team from eligibility. They receive referrals, mostly from child welfare social workers. They assess eligibility for the family, and then they do a warm handoff to the Linkages team if the family meets eligibility. That was seen as another way to engage with families and help them see the value of participation.