



Best Practice: Linking Cash Assistance to Workforce Development

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CITY: NEW YORK

POLICY AREAS: SOCIAL SERVICES; WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

BEST PRACTICE

New York City's **cash assistance employment program** (Human Resources Administration) is a comprehensive network of programs, linked by a common computer system that provides employment and support services to individuals of all abilities.

ISSUE

In 1995 one of every seven New Yorkers, approximately one million people, were receiving cash assistance. The system did not emphasize the importance of employment and while some programs were offered, those programs were not well structured, were not a condition for the receipt of cash assistance, and many recipients could not find a program that met their service needs.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of the city's employment program are to move cash assistance recipients to their greatest level of self-sufficiency. The result of this movement will be a reduction in the cash assistance caseload. Because of the number of non governmental programs involved in this effort and the need for these programs to communicate regularly with city staff, a system also had to be developed to allow communication to happen quickly and efficiently.

IMPLEMENTATION

New York City's employment programs started basically as a single offering of employment services but have grown to become a network of approaches designed to serve a heterogeneous cash assistance population. The programs are offered by a range of service providers, government and private, for profit and not for profit entities. Individuals are initially assessed by government staff and then are referred for a more detailed assessment by a contracted vendor. Following the assessment and the completion of an employment plan, with contributions by both vendor and government staff, individuals who cannot be placed into jobs immediately are referred to a program that best meets their needs. The most common referral options are:

- For those with relatively few barriers: participation in a combination of work opportunities, administered by city agencies, and job search, education and training provided by contracted vendors.
- For those who claim physical or mental health barriers to employment: referral to a provider for a comprehensive medical examination, or biopsychosocial assessment, followed by engagement through that provider in a tailored employment program. These vendors also provide assistance, including advocacy, to those clients judged potentially eligible to receive federal Supplemental Security Income disability benefits.
- For those with low literacy levels: enrollment with vendors who provide a combination of work opportunities in community based agencies and classroom education.
- For those indicating substance abuse: assessment by clinical staff and referral to treatment either alone, if the addiction is severe, or treatment and employment and training activities, if the addiction is less severe.



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The New York City (NYC) WAY (Work, Accountability, You) computer system links these and other programs. This system was designed as part of the city's welfare reform efforts and is deployed at all of the city's intake locations, known as Job Centers, and through the internet at vendor locations.

In Job Centers workers use NYC WAY's structured interactive interviews to ensure any barriers to employment are addressed and begin the process of developing an employment plan for the client. Following vendor input, individuals who have not been able to obtain employment immediately from a job search activity are assigned to a longer term employment activity.

Employment programs receive a list of all assigned individuals electronically. Programs can consult a modified version of the agency's electronic case record over the internet to obtain relevant information on those enrolled. Information may include previous employment history, compliance records and details on upcoming agency interviews. The vendor can also record case notes which are then immediately available to workers at the Job Centers for reference and can be used as the individual progresses toward employment.

Vendors use the system to enter the employment information from successful job placements triggering an automated re-budgeting process. The system is also used by vendors to enter compliance information on participants. Based on this entry, those that fail to comply automatically begin an infraction process. If an appeal arises during the infraction process, agency staff mediating the appeal can consult attendance and other relevant participation information maintained in the NYC WAY system.

COST

The services budget for the major employment programs is \$155 million annually.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

New York City's program has led to a record number of job placements and a substantial reduction in the cash assistance caseload. In the past eight years under Mayor Bloomberg the city has recorded over 650,000 job placements of cash assistance applicants and recipients. The cash assistance caseload now stands at approximately 355,000, its lowest level since 1964 and down from 1.1 million in 1995. Of this reduction, there has been decrease of over 23% under Mayor Bloomberg. The electronic system allows the city to efficiently track participation in employment participation and receive information from participating programs.

TIMELINE

- 1994 Planning for welfare reform began
- 1995 Employment efforts for single, childless adults introduced.-almost all required to participate in one activity-work experience, if able bodied
- 1995 All city agencies involved in efforts to provide appropriate work experience opportunities for those on cash assistance required to participate
- 1996 Employment efforts for parents with children introduced-initially only for those with children over 6 years of age
- 1996 Computer system to assign individuals to work activities and track participation (NYC WAY) introduced
- 1998 Employment efforts expanded to parents of children three months old or older
- 1999 Requirement to participate in employment activity while applying for cash assistance fully implemented
- 2000 More comprehensive network of employment activities developed to help ensure as many recipients as possible can participate in an employment activity
- 2002 Employment programs linked through common computer system
- 2005 Program to provide employment services to those with medical and mental health barriers introduced, creating a full network of employment programs



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LEGISLATION

While New York City began its programs without legislation, the overall effort was supported by changes made by the federal government under the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. This legislation sets standards for having a set percentage of each state's caseload involved in work activities. It also reinforced the notion in the city's program that helping recipients reach employment is the goal for those receiving cash assistance.

LESSONS LEARNED

Sending the message that everyone must be involved in an employment activity, to the maximum extent possible, is critical. A program must be available to meet the needs of the entire population. Programs must be adapted to meet the changing needs of the recipient population. As the population changes, new and different services or approaches may be required to continue to have success.

TRANSFERABILITY

A consensus that people receiving cash assistance should participate in activities designed to achieve their maximum level of self sufficiency is critical. An ability to make investments in those working, possible from the savings developed from reducing the caseload, is also important.

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