
Enhancing Performance through Effective Case Management

One of the most important factors impacting Workforce Development, and the TANF Employment and Training Programs in particular, is case management. By implementing strategic case management processes and procedures, agencies can ensure compliance with state and federal policies as well as build a framework for promoting positive performance.

“In general, effective case management requires paying attention to each customer’s specific steps toward self-sufficiency,” says Marilyn Sandoz, Consultant with Florida-based Taylor, Lombardi, Hall & Wydra, P.A. As Sandoz explains, each step along the way must be anticipated, documented, and performed—from completing assigned activities to obtaining employment. Case managers who follow the proper procedures will have a direct impact upon not only their customers’ successes—but also upon their agency’s overall performance.

First Things First: You gotta have a plan!

Solid case management requires a strong employment plan, which is essential in assisting a customer in reaching his/her goals and becoming self-sufficient. The plan must be a collaborative effort between the customer and the case manager; utilize assessment results, and outline the customer’s responsibilities and specific steps toward achievable goals. Employment plans function as contracts between customers and case managers, specifying responsibilities for each party.

In Florida’s Welfare Transition Program, the employment plan is called an Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP). In every state, however, the employment plan is much more than a mere bureaucratic document. “The way the plan is viewed by case managers can have a direct impact on the plan’s effectiveness,” says Sandoz. “It should be viewed as a tool rather than a task—one that provides a clear path of actions needed to achieve goals within specified timelines.”



A well-written employment plan assists a customer in more than just complying with the program. It provides the customer with a mapped-out path to self-sufficiency. In addition, it is a living document that must be updated as changes occur and the customer progresses. A well-executed plan can be utilized by both the customer and case manager to assist the customer in reaching goals and ensure his or her compliance with the program.

Employment plans should contain specific and comprehensive information to be effective, including:

- Short- and long-term employment goals
- Educational and personal goals
- Barriers to employment
- Supportive services provided
- Assigned activities
- Assigned hours in activities
- Dates to complete activities
- Required actions (steps to self-sufficiency) identifying a path of actions to achieve goals within specified timelines

“Effective IRPs include required actions that lead to specific outcomes,” says Sandoz. “It’s important that plans be written so customers will know what specific actions they are required to do and when, including participation documentation requirements.” In addition, she noted IRP’s must be updated as changes occur.

For example, an IRP must be updated when a customer completes the Job Search and Job Readiness Assistance activity and is then assigned to Community Service and Job Skills Training activities (computer classes). An update would also be required in instances when the customer's TANF and Food Stamps issuance amounts change, because allowable hours must be recalculated and assigned accordingly for the Community Service and Work Experience activities. And since each and every step to self-sufficiency is crucial to an effective IRP, the plan must provide *specific* guidelines for the customer.

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Take a look at the following examples of non-specific and specific IRP guidelines:

Non-specific steps:

1. Attend Job Search and Job Readiness Assistance classes.
2. Submit timesheets every month.
3. Notify case manager when you become employed.

Specific steps:

1. Attend Job Search and Job Readiness Assistance classes at the Central One Stop, 123 Elm St., Utopia, Monday through Friday from 9 AM until 4PM (30 hours per week) from 7/6/09-7/17/09.
2. Submit timesheets signed by instructor(s) every Monday by 4 PM.
3. Submit employment verification form completed by employer within three days of the start date of employment.

By pinpointing exactly what, when, and where specific steps should take place, specific guidelines give customers the exact details they need while on the path to self-sufficiency.

Doing the Numbers: Activities that Count

A strong employment plan is functional only when it dovetails with policy guidelines. As customers progress through the steps outlined in the plan, it's essential that assigned activities are appropriate, activities are correctly assigned and documented, and all compliance requirements are met along the way. For example, a minimum number of hours must be completed by the customer in “core” activities before “core plus” activities will count toward meeting participation requirements. Ensuring requisite hours are completed by the various customers in the TANF program (e.g., one-parent family, two-parent family with and without childcare, teen parent) will assist your agency in meeting the TANF program performance requirements of 50% Federal All Family Participation Rate and the 90% Federal Two Parent Family Participation Rate (required for states to avoid financial penalties).

While taking individual customers' needs into consideration, “case managers must ensure that the activities outlined in a customer's employment plan are in compliance with program requirements,” Sandoz explains. Appropriate activities should be determined by assessing the individual's employability, skills, work history, and barriers. In addition, there are specific participation requirements for one- and two-parent families—and for families with a child under six years of age.

Once a customer's individual background, state/federal program policies, and local operating procedures are taken into consideration, work activities should be assigned—with special attention to whether they are “core” or “core plus” work activities—and then recorded in state management information systems to track participation.

In particular, case managers should note:

Core work activity requirements are as follows:

- Single Parent Family/Household with a child under the age of six and Teen Parent in GED activity – 87 hours of a 87-hour monthly requirement
- Single Parent Family/Household with a child over the age of six – 87 hours of a 130-hour monthly requirement
- Two Parent Family/Household without childcare – 130 hours of a 152- hour monthly requirement
- Two Parent Family/Household with childcare – 217 hours of a 238- hour monthly requirement

To meet these requirements, appropriate core and core-plus activities must be assigned:

Core work activities include:

- Unsubsidized employment
- Subsidized private sector employment
- Subsidized public sector employment
- Work experience
- On-the-job training
- Job search and job readiness assistance
- Community service
- Vocational education
- Providing childcare services

“Core plus” work activities – count toward meeting the participation requirement when requisite monthly hours in Core work activities are completed, and include:

- Education directly related to employment
- Job Skills Training
- Satisfactory attendance at secondary school or in a course of study leading to a GED (may be assigned as a stand-alone activity for a teen parent without a High School Diploma or GED)

The End Game: Customer Success

Effective case management requires much more than knowledge of policy guidelines and compliance issues. Rather, it relies upon a joint effort that begins with a comprehensive assessment of the customer that provides the case manager with the information pertinent to the customer’s short- and long-term employment goals. This information is then translated into an employment plan to be utilized by the customer in attaining self-sufficiency, while maintaining compliance with TANF program requirements. As a living document, this plan should be consulted regularly over time, and updated as goals are accomplished and as barriers to employment are addressed.

“A well-executed employment plan is both personal and practical,” says Sandoz. “Goals are predictable and attainable when guidelines on the employment plan are followed. And they’re much more likely to be followed—and remain current—if the customers truly believe in them. When customers are invested from the onset, they’re more likely to be engaged with their own plans and goals.” Case managers who work with customers along the way, and who provide details and specifics, greatly ensure that engagement translates into compliance and performance.

But it’s a two-way street, according to Sandoz. “There must be a collaborative effort between the case manager and the customer,” she explains. “For that to happen, the case manager must see the employment plan for what it really is: a tool for the customer’s success.”

Taylor, Lombardi, Hall & Wydra, P.A., is a firm of independent Certified Public Accountants, located in the Orlando, FL area. For over 15 years, TLHW has provided monitoring, continuous improvement, and technical assistance services to Workforce Boards and non-profit organizations—including conducting various process reviews for Workforce Boards. For more information about TLHW, please contact us at (407) 539-2066 or visit www.tlh-cpa.com. ■