

How Do I Select Outcomes?

In the context of a Linkages initiative, evaluating outcomes means measuring the effects of your initiative on the families served. There are many possible effects on your clients. Perhaps Linkages clients are more likely to achieve reunification than non-Linkages clients. Perhaps they are more successful at resolving their sanctions in the CalWORKs or TANF program.

The box at right suggests some possible outcomes to evaluate. You are not limited to the outcomes listed in the box. Other outcomes you think of may provide the best information to you about whether your Linkages initiative is meeting its goals. In the process of selecting outcomes, consider the key questions below, which will help you determine which outcomes are most applicable to your Linkages initiative.

Which Outcomes Best Apply to My Linkages Initiative?

Important considerations when selecting outcomes include:

- What are the goals of your Linkages initiative? Which outcomes can you measure that will show you whether you are achieving those goals?
- What types of clients do you serve in your Linkages initiative? For example, if your initiative includes Family Reunification clients, you can consider measuring outcomes that have to do with reunification success.
- How long has your initiative been in operation? It takes time to see the effects of new practices on the families served. To measure these effects, you need to have data on families served from the time they become Linkages clients to the time that the outcomes you're interested in have taken place. Some outcomes can be measured sooner than others.
- How many clients do you serve in your initiative? If you have a small number of clients, you may want to select outcomes that would include data from all of your clients (rather than, e.g., only those not sanctioned at time of entry). The smaller the group of clients you assess in your outcomes evaluation, the more difficult it may be to see accurate effects of Linkages on them.
- What types of data do you keep track of in a computerized data system? For each outcome you would like to measure, think about all of the pieces of information you need on each client in order to measure the outcome, and make sure you are collecting that information consistently and accurately.

Possible Linkages Outcomes

Child Welfare

- Percent of children with a substantiated recurrence of maltreatment after 3 months, 6 months, and/or 9 months.
- Percent of children not removed from home with substantiated recurrence of maltreatment after 3 months, 6 months, and/or 9 months.
- Percent of families that achieve reunification.
- Time to reunification.
- Percent of children who do not re-enter foster care.
- Of children living at home, percentage whose Child Welfare case closed because the family stabilized and services were no longer needed.
- Of children living in foster care, number of placements during the time their Linkages case was open, and within 6 and 12 months after their Linkages case closed.

CalWORKs/TANF

- Percent of parents who have CalWORKs sanctions resolved.
- Amount of monthly cash grant (without sanctions).
- Amount of parents' monthly earnings and wages.
- Length of time parents receive cash aid.
- Percentage of clients that meet Welfare-to-Work federal participation requirements when their Linkages case opens, and 6 and 12 months after that date.
- Percentage of clients making progress toward meeting work rate requirements (education, vocational training, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence classes, etc.) at 6 and 12 months after their Linkages case opens.
- Of those who resolve sanctions after entering Linkages, percentage who have subsequent sanctions.
- Of clients not sanctioned at time of entry into Linkages, percentage who are sanctioned while in Linkages.
- Of families who exit CalWORKs/TANF, percentage who re-apply for CalWORKs/TANF aid.