

**A REPORT BY
THE 2014-2015 CONTRA COSTA COUNTY GRAND JURY**
725 Court Street
Martinez, California 94553

Report 1502

**UNDERUTILIZATION OF CALFRESH
IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY**

APPROVED BY THE GRAND JURY:

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Contra Costa County Grand Jury Report 1502

UNDERUTILIZATION OF CALFRESH IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

TO: Board of Supervisors and the Employment and Human Services Department

SUMMARY

In 2012, the County failed to receive as much as \$54,011,963 in federal funds because only 67,999 of the estimated 116,074 residents eligible for CalFresh benefits actually participated in the program. Federal analysts calculate that each \$1.00 of CalFresh benefits generates \$1.79 of economic activity, so the County may have lost as much as \$96,681,414 in 2012.

When CalFresh recipients spend their benefit dollars on food, the dollars they would have otherwise spent on food can be used for other purchases. Those other purchases may include taxable nonfood items, which generate additional revenue in the form of sales tax. The County's share of the projected additional sales tax revenue for 2012 would have been \$486,108. CalFresh benefits also support the health and productivity of current and future generations of County residents and reduce healthcare costs, including those borne by the County.

The County participates in the statewide objective of reaching 75% CalFresh participation by May 2016. What must be done in order for the County to reach that goal and realize the associated benefits?

In order to reach the goal, the County must increase both the number of new applications and the number of active ongoing cases. Outreach is the primary way to increase the number of new applications. Removal of barriers to successful recertification is the primary way to increase the number of ongoing cases. The County is continually addressing both issues, but can do still more.

Outreach work should be supported by local businesses. It should extend to additional venues. Impediment from staffing issues should be resolved and newer technologies should be implemented. Signage and directions at offices should be improved and directions on the website and the automated phone menu should be improved. Communication and cooperation across programs and across departments also should be bolstered.

METHODOLOGY

The Contra Costa Civil Grand Jury:

- Reviewed data and reports regarding CalFresh from California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Alliance to Transform CalFresh, and California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), as well as the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- Reviewed data and reports requested from the Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) and Human Resources Department.
- Reviewed the website for the California Market Match Consortium's Market Match program. Reviewed websites for Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association and Contra Costa Certified Farmers' Markets Inc. and visited a representative farmers' market.
- Interviewed representatives from various County departments as well as from nearby counties. One of those nearby counties has a CalFresh participation rate higher than 80% and one has a participation lower than 45%.
- Interviewed a representative of the charitable organization that distributes food and a CalFresh Partners Group representative.
- Visited the CalFresh website for Contra Costa County, and called their 24-hour phone number as well as phone numbers for selected offices. Made physical visits to County offices where prospective CalFresh applicants can obtain information and apply for benefits.

BACKGROUND

California has one of the lowest participation rates of all states in the federally-funded food assistance program. The participation rate measures the percentage of persons in the population who are eligible for and actually receive benefits.

CalFresh is part of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the "Federal Food Stamp Program" or simply as "food stamps". It is an entitlement program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provides financial assistance to eligible low-income individuals and households. The benefits are funded entirely by the USDA, and the associated administrative costs are split, with the federal government contributing 50%, the State of California contributing 35%, and the County contributing 15%.

The average monthly CalFresh benefit to a participating California household was \$330 in 2013. Local businesses, the County, and the State also benefit from the participation of individual households.

For individual households, these benefits increase their ability to purchase adequate amounts of nutritious food. Numerous studies have shown the importance of a healthy diet in maintaining overall health. This is particularly important for children who do better in school and are more apt to grow up to be healthy productive adults if they have enough healthy food to eat each day. More than 60% of CalFresh households include children. This benefit is also critical for households that do not include children, including the 36% that have income from earnings but are not earning enough to exceed CalFresh eligibility criteria. Typically this means that they are living at less than 125% of the federal poverty level. The members of these households need adequate nutritious food to stay healthy and avoid the health problems that might push them below the federal poverty level.

Local businesses and the County benefit from the CalFresh funds as well. Businesses receive revenue when individual recipients spend their CalFresh dollars. Those businesses, in turn, spend the dollars on personnel, increased merchandise, and business expansion. This is the multiplier effect that USDA economists calculate at 1.79, meaning that every \$1.00 of CalFresh funding generates \$1.79 of economic activity.

The County and State also benefit from CalFresh funds. The dollars that a recipient household or individual would have spent on food without the CalFresh funds can be spent on other taxable, nonfood items. These items generate additional sales tax revenue that is shared by State and County. By CFPA's calculation, based on USDA statistics, full participation in CalFresh would have generated additional sales tax revenue in 2012 of \$957,024 for the State General Fund; \$622,825 for the State non-General Fund; and \$486,108 for the County.

California recognizes the importance of these benefits and seeks to increase program participation. According to the California CalFresh Outreach Plan for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2015-2016, issued August 15, 2014, just 57% of the State's eligible CalFresh participants received benefits as shown by the USDA statistics for FFY 2011 (cited as most recent statistics then available). While this was the second lowest participation rate of all states, it is the highest ranking that California has achieved in the past decade.

According to calculations done by California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA), the County's participation rate is in the bottom half of California counties, ranking 37th out of 58 counties¹ based on year-end 2012 data.

With CalFresh participation lagging behind most other states, a statewide initiative called "Alliance to Transform CalFresh" was launched in 2011. Initiated by the California Association of Food Banks, the Alliance now includes a variety of nonprofits, food advocacy groups, and community-based organizations (CBO's). Its mission is to help individual counties strategize and implement plans to increase CalFresh participation rates to meet the statewide goal of 75% participation by May 2016.

The Alliance acts in conjunction with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), which has been working since 2005 to increase program participation. Together these agencies attempt to identify strategies that have proven to be effective in those counties with high participation rates and share successful strategies statewide.

CDSS regularly updates its strategies and objectives, which it reports periodically in the CalFresh Outreach Plan. The current Plan covers FFY 2015 – 2016, Oct 1, 2014 – Sept 30, 2016. CDSS monitors and analyzes data on a county by county basis, and shares this county-level detail widely within the state. However, CDSS only provides consolidated statewide data to the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service for the federal analysis of trends and annual ranking of states by participation rates. This means a few counties with low percentages of CalFresh participation among eligible residents will significantly impact the state's national participation-rate ranking.

The strategies presented by both Alliance to Transform CalFresh and CDSS consistently focus on two basic components required to successfully increase the participation rate. The number of new applicants must increase and the number of recipients dropped from the program because they fail to meet the program's recertification requirements must decrease. The failure of eligible recipients to recertify undermines any overall increase in the rate of participation by offsetting some of the increase in new applications.

The Alliance and CDSS both recommend increasing the number of new applicants through various methods of outreach. They use the term "outreach" to include educating the public about CalFresh benefits and eligibility requirements, and also finding ways to provide potential applicants with access and/or the means to apply. Both the Alliance and CDSS agree that educating the public can be accomplished by means of physical visits, public presentations or workshops, and/or distribution of printed materials. Both agencies recommend that assistance with the application process should be provided in

¹Refer to www.cfpa.net for complete 2014 tables by County and discussion of eligibility criteria and calculation methodology used.

person, by phone and/or by website. Both agencies also recommend using current technology to support and enhance access.

The Alliance and CDSS both emphasize the need to prevent recipients from being dropped from the program simply because they fail to successfully complete the required recertification. They recommend improving physical, electronic, and telephonic access to the program and reducing barriers that discourage recipients from maintaining active enrollment. As with the recommended outreach strategies to increase new applications, the Alliance and CDSS both recommend finding ways to provide easier access to the program administrators. They again recommend use of new technology to support easier access.

The current, FFY 2015-2016, California CalFresh Outreach Plan (CFO), issued August 15, 2014, outlines three fundamental goals:

- Improve participation and retention in CalFresh targeted counties to help alleviate poor nutrition, hunger, and food insecurity in California;
- Address barriers to program participation especially within target populations and educate people potentially eligible for the program about CalFresh;
- Improve partnership between stakeholders and coordination between programs.

The Plan identifies the following target populations, with the allowance that specific target emphasis will vary from county to county:

- Seniors
- Working low-income households
- Immigrants
- Latinos
- Mixed-status households
- Veterans and military families.

The Plan identifies the following barriers that must be addressed:

- Lack of knowledge of who is eligible for the program, especially among working low-income families;
- Frustration with the application process, especially with the amount and type of information each household is required to submit with its CalFresh application;
- Misconceptions in immigrant population including
 - o Fear that applying for the program will affect their application for legal residency;
 - o Fear of losing future earnings by having to pay back the benefits they have received through the program.
- Perceptions among seniors that they are taking benefits away from others or that they have less need or reason to enroll.

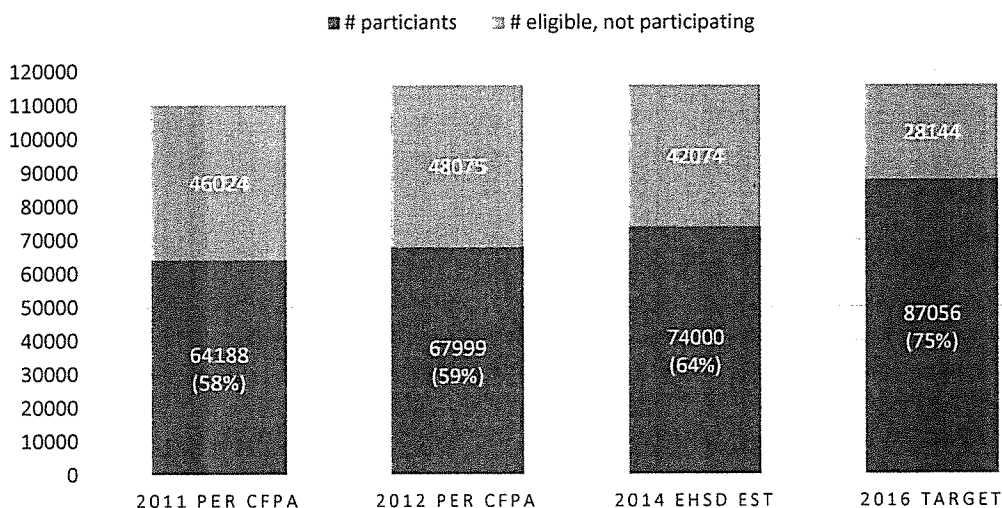
The Plan stresses that in compliance with USDA regulations, no money under any CFO contract shall be used for public service announcements on radio, television or billboards. CDSS publishes the Plan for all California counties to incorporate into their own specific plans and strategies for increasing their CalFresh participation rates.

DISCUSSION

Contra Costa County's EHSD, which administers CalFresh for the County, has sent a representative to each of the last two annual summits convened by the Alliance to Transform CalFresh. The purpose of these summits is to evaluate progress and discuss new strategies. EHSD incorporates the above goals and targets into the County's goals and plans. It develops the County's target numbers from the statewide target numbers as shared at the summits and in state publications.

EHSD has achieved measurable improvement in CalFresh participation in the County as shown in the following chart, which provides the number of residents participating in the CalFresh program versus the number estimated to be eligible but not participating. The numbers for 2011 and 2012 are confirmed numbers per CFPA reports. The numbers for 2014 are estimated by EHSD with the estimate of total residents eligible for CalFresh (116,074) unchanged from 2012 until a more exact calculation is available from USDA. The target participation number for 2016 was projected by EHSD from the 2012 actual numbers. Again, this target is based on the assumption that the number of total residents eligible for CalFresh remains unchanged from the 2012 total.

CALFRESH - # PARTICIPATING VS # ELIGIBLE BUT NOT PARTICIPATING IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY



NOTE: all data in this chart and the following table are calendar year, as adjusted by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service from Program Year data.

The number of cases is increasing year over year, although at a much-reduced rate from the dramatic recession-fueled increase that nearly tripled the number of families participating in CalFresh over the 2006 to 2013 period. However, the number of new applications since 2013 has been decreasing:

Calendar Yr.	Number of Applications, Avg. per Month	Number of Active Cases, Avg. per Month
2011/12	3,629	32,397
2012/13	3,492	33,320
2013/14	3,307	34,885

These numbers suggest a reduction in the number of participants who remain eligible but fail to recertify within a given period of time. This is known in the industry as “churn” rate because those recipients eventually re-apply and go through the approval process again. The reduction in the churn rate has occurred through a number of measures taken by EHSD. This is an important part of the goal to increase overall participation, but is insufficient to significantly increase overall participation if the number of successful new applications does not also increase.

Fewer people are applying, as reflected in the reduced number of new applications. However, CFPA and CDSS statistics do not show a corresponding decrease in the number of potentially-eligible residents. This means that the overall participation rate could be higher. The increasing number of active cases alone is not enough to achieve the targeted 75% participation rate. If the overall participation rate is to reach the 75% target by May 2016, the number of successful new applications must also increase.

The CalFresh Partners Group has supported EHSD outreach efforts to increase the number of new CalFresh applications. The CalFresh Partners Group is co-chaired by EHSD and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano Counties, and its members include the Contra Costa Crisis Center (which handles “Call 211”), First Five Contra Costa, the Multi-Faith A.C.T.I.O.N. Coalition, and Meals on Wheels. The Partners Group adjusts its membership as appropriate to best support CalFresh outreach. For example, the Partners Group added Meals on Wheels after discussions in late 2014 identified a need to improve access to seniors.

EHSD trains volunteers and interns to support the Food Bank’s outreach efforts. There are approximately 60 volunteers from community-based organizations (CBO’s) who conduct general outreach work at soup kitchens, food pantries, and other food distribution sites. Additionally, two paid workers from the Food Bank provide application assistance. This work is valuable in getting more applications completed by prospective

CalFresh applicants, but is limited to assisting applicants only up to the point of submission. This is because State regulation specifies that only County employees can make an official eligibility determination.

EHSD maximizes the value of the support these application assistants provide by helping them to submit correct and complete applications. The more correct and complete the application, the less additional work the EHSD eligibility worker has to do to confirm or deny eligibility. EHSD has assigned dedicated staff from two units to be available to expeditiously answer questions from the application workers while they are in the process of taking applications.

To support the work of the Partner Group volunteers and application assistants, EHSD identifies recurring problems by tracking the number and disposition of applications from each volunteer group. To perform the tracking, EHSD has assigned each volunteer group a California Works Information Network (CalWIN) vendor number. By using the CalWIN vendor number, EHSD can identify where and what type of additional training is needed to improve the quality of assisted applications.

The work to improve the quality of these applications is an ongoing effort. For example, from June 2014 through November 2014, members of the Partners Group submitted 199 applications directly to the CalFresh Program Analyst. Of the 199 applications, the Food Bank submitted 180 and other CBO partners submitted the remaining 19. (For purposes of this particular analysis of assisted applications, EHSD did not track electronically filed applications.) EHSD approved 91 of the tracked applications, denied 82, and classified 26 as "status undetermined". EHSD reaches out to those applicants where the status is undetermined because of incomplete information or missing verification documents, but must deny the application if no response is received within 30 days.

EHSD examined the 82 denials to determine specific training needs. EHSD found that the main reasons for denial were that individual's income exceeded the allowed level, and that applications lacked complete information and/or lacked verification documents. A training session was held on August 12, 2014. EHSD will provide further training as specific needs are identified so that the application assistance work will provide the most effective possible support to EHSD eligibility staff.

The Food Bank has recently hired a CalFresh manager to act as a liaison between EHSD and the Food Bank. The manager is working to maximize CalFresh partnerships and outreach efforts. Through the CalFresh Outreach Partners' Meeting with community and faith-based organizations, the manager and a representative from EHSD explain the benefits of Food Stamp/CalFresh participation. These partners provide access to the populations in need of food aid, particularly the targeted populations identified as most under-served and/or under-participating. Many members of these targeted populations are reluctant to share information of any kind with a government employee, fearing that information will be shared with Immigration Services

or other investigative agencies that will somehow cause trouble for the prospective applicant. In contrast, the volunteers and food bank workers are trusted members of these communities.

These Partner Group volunteers have better access to these target populations than EHSD employees. EHSD in turn supports the volunteers with ongoing training to make their outreach and application assistance work more successful. EHSD also expeditiously answers questions so that applications submitted with assistance from the Partners Group volunteers will be correct and complete. This partnership effort results in more successful CalFresh enrollments than EHSD could achieve if limited to their own staff. In turn, increased CalFresh participation reduces food insecurity in the populations served by the CBOs and relieves increasing demand on the resources of the Food Bank.

The CalFresh Partners Group is, however, missing one key element, representation from cities and local businesses. Cities benefit from the economic gain generated by CalFresh benefits, and local businesses gain revenue from sales to CalFresh recipients. Increasing CalFresh participation is clearly in their best interest, and the Partners Group, in turn, would benefit from cities and businesses contributing marketing ideas and support.

Local farmers markets illustrate how local businesses can support the CalFresh Partners Group objective to increase CalFresh participation. Most farmers markets in the County participate in California's "Market Match" program, whereby \$10 from a CalFresh EBT card will purchase \$15 worth of tokens that are accepted by all the vendors in that market.² These markets freely hand out brochures explaining how to apply for CalFresh because they benefit financially from the increased market traffic. The market managers answer questions about CalFresh and encourage prospective applicants to enroll. It would be a small additional step for market managers to arrange and publicize CalFresh enrollment days, providing space for an application taker to work with prospective applicants at their site on prearranged market days.

² For more information on this program and participating markets, visit the websites for the Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association (www.pcfma.com), the Contra Costa Certified Farmers' Markets Inc. (www.cccfm.org), and/or California's "Market Match" program (www.marketmatch.org).



CalFresh Partners Group does not include Chambers of Commerce or Economic Development Officials from cities with high concentrations of low-income residents likely to be eligible for CalFresh. These entities have marketing experience and expertise to add to the Partners Group. They would be able to explain the economic benefits generated by increased CalFresh participation to the businesses they represent and could encourage those businesses to accept EBT cards on the basis of the benefits of generating additional revenue and/or other local economic activity. They would also be able to encourage the businesses they represent to make CalFresh information such as the "Myths and Facts" brochure available to their customers. Finally, as members of the Partners Group, they could facilitate enrollment events similar to what is proposed for the farmers markets.

In particular, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in Contra Costa County (www.h5c.org) could be valuable in educating their members about the opportunity for economic gain presented by CalFresh. They are positioned to make sure their members --- and those members' customers and other business partners --- know that the brochures and applications are available in Spanish. These members of the Latino community would be uniquely able to counter the myths about CalFresh application endangering status of application for legal residency, etc.

In addition to working with the CalFresh Partners Group, EHSD engages in direct outreach work themselves. Appendix 1 includes calendars of their outreach events for August 2014 through February 2015. Many of those events reach the targeted populations. For example, East Bay Operation Stand Down, which was last held in September 2014, is a bi-annual event that connects homeless and at-risk veterans with a multitude of services and resources. Many of the health fair / health screening events and Covered California enrollment events offer opportunities for CalFresh representatives to reach the Latino community and the Asian Pacific Islander community (with translators for more than 15 languages on site). Several libraries in the County have held enrollment events where application assistance was provided and awareness of the CalFresh program was raised, usually in conjunction with Covered California enrollment events.

No events were held at any schools from August 2014 through February 2015 as shown in the calendar of events in Appendix 1. This omission is significant since outreach by the Food Bank, through their Partners Group outreach work, is limited to including CalFresh brochures approximately once per year in the Food Bank's Farm-2-Kids weekly deliveries of fresh produce to schools. The limitation is due to the volume of these deliveries, which go to over 9,000 students. During this period, there also were not any events held at senior centers and/or senior housing to reach prospective senior applicants who are often not comfortable applying online, but not sufficiently mobile to visit office locations.

Technology is very helpful at these off-site enrollment events. The CalFresh Partners Group/Food Bank application assistants use iPads to access the public CalFresh website. They fill out online applications and take and upload pictures of the applicant's verification documents to submit along with the application. EHSD is taking the use of technology one step further by using tablets that have preloaded application forms and that can accept electronic signatures. Although only at an early stage, EHSD is working to expand tablet access to all EHSD programs, including CalFresh, to allow application assistants to check on the status of existing applications to determine what, if any, information is missing or might still be needed and complete the process on the spot.

However, the County's Department of Information and Technology must first address firewall issues. These issues are expected to be resolved by June 2015. EHSD is prepared with adequate staff and/or volunteers and an adequate number of available tablets to use this technological enhancement at CalFresh enrollment events as soon as the firewall issues are resolved. EHSD expects this enhancement to make the enrollment events more efficient, enabling the same number of workers to process and/or resolve eligibility issues in a shorter period of time while offsite, without any need for additional follow-up work at EHSD's office.

The outreach efforts by EHSD described above have been hampered by a large number of vacancies, especially in the Eligibility Worker I classification. Filling these vacancies is a slow and time-consuming process due to systemic issues in the Human Resources Department. Human Resources has suffered from its own staffing shortages, with only four Human Resource Consultants through most of 2014 handling the Human Resources needs of 29 County departments with approximately 1,400 job classifications. Longstanding hiring protocols and business practices slow even Human Resources' best efforts. This slowness in hiring creates particular challenges in filling entry-level positions, such as Eligibility Worker I, where there is comparatively high turnover, even without any challenges in regard to competitive pay or benefits.

For instance, as of October 27, 2014, EHSD had 45.6 FTE (Full-time Equivalency) vacancies for just CalFresh eligibility workers. Human Resources opened recruitment for the Eligibility Worker I classification October 13, and closed it on October 17, at which time they had approximately 1,400 applications. After an initial screening, Human Resources reduced the potential applicants to 700, but as required, notified all rejected

applicants that they had seven days to appeal. Review of the appeals resulted in the number of active applicants increasing to 800. Human Resources then sent the active applicants the required 10-day notice of the required written exam, to be held November 13 through 17. Only 450 of the 800 applicants invited to take the written exam did so. Tests were scored by December 12, with 260 of the applicants receiving a passing score of 70% or higher. Those 260 individuals were put on a list of eligible applicants, which was provided to EHSD.

Only after this process was completed could EHSD start to contact applicants from the list, arrange interviews, perform background checks and make job offers. From this group of applicants, 52 permanent Eligibility I workers were hired and started training on February 2. Training for these permanent workers, which covers CalFresh, Medi-Cal and CalWORKS, will take approximately four months. At that time – the end of May – they will be assigned to district offices and be able to start work as new, entry-level eligibility workers. This time-frame, 7-1/2 months, is at the low end of the average of 8 to 10 month timeframe estimated by Human Resources for filling this position over the past year.

EHSD also hired 40 County temporary workers to supplement the 52 permanent hires. These temporary workers (“temps”) are not considered to be County employees for purposes of benefits or statutory authority to make eligibility acceptances or denials. They can support the permanent eligibility workers by preparing applications up to the point of the eligibility determination. A supervisor can then review those applications and make the final eligibility approval or denial. The training for these temps is less-inclusive than that for permanent employees. They will have completed their training by the end of March and be assigned out to EHSD district offices by early April.

In addition to vacancies for eligibility workers, EHSD has had long-outstanding vacancies for the positions of Social Services Program Assistant (SSPA) and Medi-Cal Program Assistant (MPA). In February 2015, EHSD had not received a list of qualified applicants for these positions for 10 months. Human Resources will now open these positions to take applications on a regular basis, typically quarterly, without waiting for a formal request from EHSD to fill vacancies, as they currently do for the Eligibility Worker I position. Even with this streamlining of the recruitment and initial qualification processes, long time lags in filling the vacancies will persist. In the past, EHSD has needed an average of 5.34 months after receiving a list from Human Resources to fill an SSPA position and 6.2 months to fill for an MPA's position. This trend is expected to continue unless or until the entire process is streamlined.

Judicious use of County temps is a useful interim measure to handle the present workloads until permanent workers can be hired and trained. It is not, however, a permanent solution. Experienced, permanent eligibility workers are key to successfully increasing the CalFresh participation rate. Experienced, permanent workers are needed to perform expanded outreach work, process the increasing volume of CalFresh applications and cases, and meet minimum quality control standards. Improving the

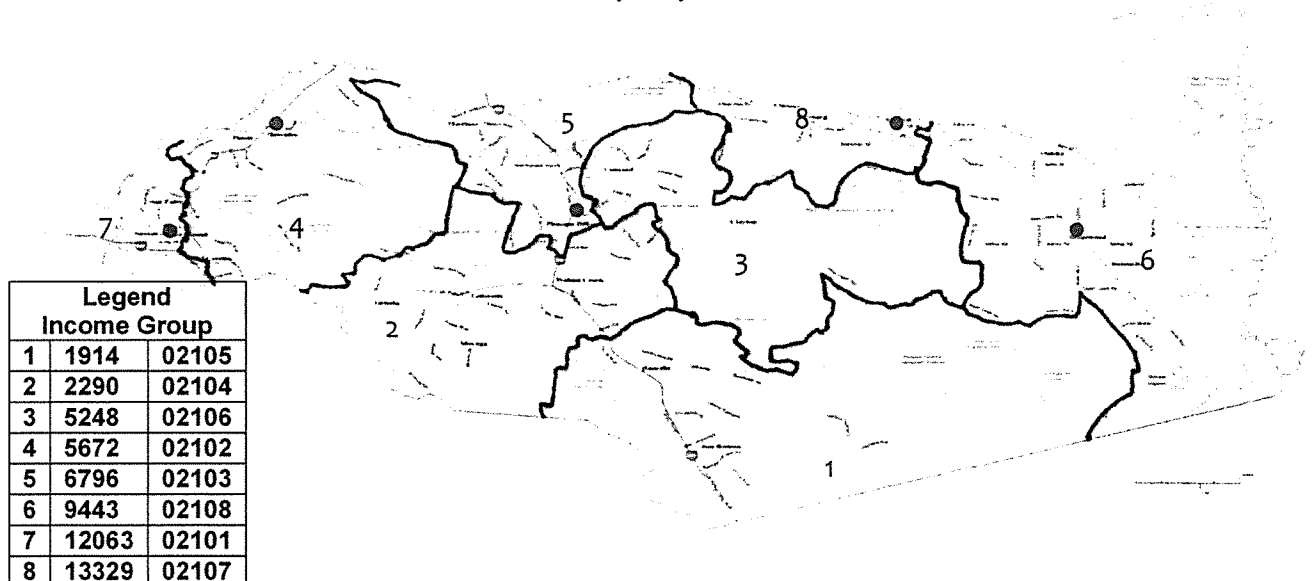
process to fill vacancies with permanent workers is critical to achieving the target of 75% CalFresh participation by May 2016. It is equally critical to sustaining that rate, and/or achieving even higher participation rates after May 2016.

Along with strong outreach efforts, easy accessibility is key to increasing the participation rate for CalFresh. One important aspect of accessibility is the location and set-up (“user-friendliness”) of offices where prospective applicants can come in person for information about CalFresh and to apply for it. At present, EHSD estimates that the percentage of CalFresh applications processed online ranges from 50% to 60% month-to-month. The remaining 40% to 50% of these application submissions are by phone or walk-in contacts.

The following map shows the location of the district offices (red dots) within the numbered areas that show the number of residents with income less than 138% of the federal poverty level. This is slightly more generous than the 125% of federal poverty level used as the eligibility criteria for purposes of statistical analyses, but purposely so. Individual cases may have allowable income deductions that permit eligibility at slightly more than 125% of the federal poverty level, and those exceptions also need easy access to CalFresh information and application intake.

Additionally, Appendix 2 shows current CalFresh recipients by zip code, illustrating a strong positive correlation between the location of CalFresh offices and participation rates. This confirms that CalFresh office locations are well situated and the importance of office locations for easy access by walk-in applicants.

Contra Costa EHSD Affordable Care Act Eligible uninsured (138% or Less of Federal Poverty Level)
2011 American Community Survey Census Data



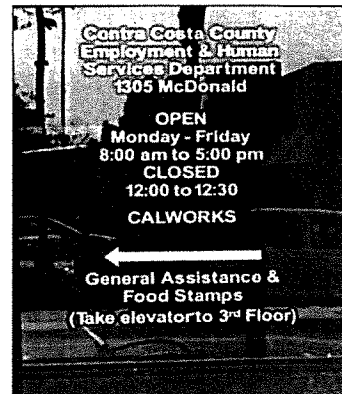
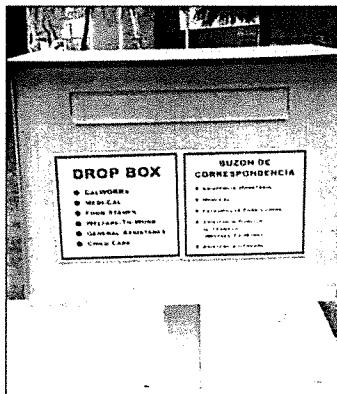
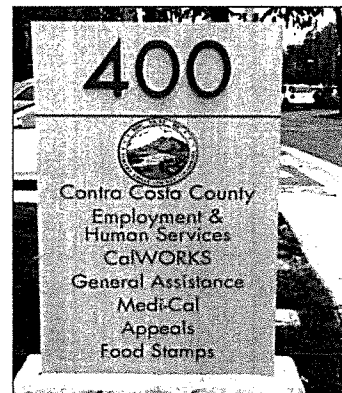
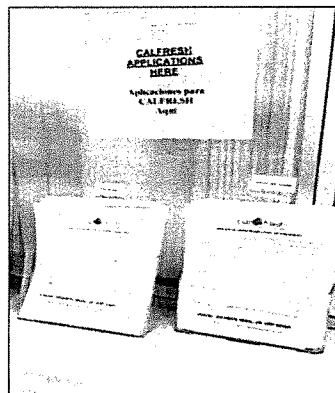
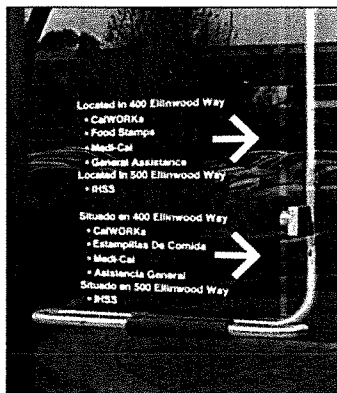
(PUMAS=Public Use Micro Data Sample Area, a census subdivision of the US)
● = EHSD offices that provide CalFresh information and/or service

It is also important that these locations be accessible by public transportation since many CalFresh-eligible individuals are reliant on public transit. All of these locations are on, or near, various public transportation routes, but prospective walk-ins may not be aware of the public transportation options or that directions to offices by public transit are available by calling 511.

The quality of experience for walk-ins is inconsistent from office to office in those communities with many low income residents. Offices vary in regard to signage and availability of clear directions for those seeking CalFresh information or applying for CalFresh benefits. To avoid confusion and prevent prospective applicants from becoming discouraged the following is required:

- Identification of CalFresh (or "Food Stamps") presence visible outside the building;
- Hours of operation visible outside the building;
- Clear directions inside the building to CalFresh information and applications (preferably bilingual) if there is no greeter or knowledgeable receptionist.

No office had all of these minimum requirements, but most had some of them. Here are examples of signage that meets at least one of these standards.



Efforts are also being made to improve accessibility to the program by streamlining the process to the greatest degree possible in a program that is subject to state and federal requirements as to forms, eligibility criteria, and needed documentation and verification. EHSD began in 2013 to roll out the "Office of the Future", a business model implemented for intake throughout the County intended to accomplish the following:

- Significantly increase the opportunities for client self-service
- Create multiple channels of access
- Reduce the time it takes to complete an eligibility determination
- Reduce the amount of manual tasks that staff must complete in processing an application
- Integrate different technology solutions together into a coordinated model
- Increase levels of "same day/next day" CalFresh benefits.

This roll-out has been largely completed and has already improved the process. The implementation of technological solutions has been particularly effective in reducing "churn", which keeps participants in active status and, thus, out of the intake process. In addition to a program change that reduces recertification requirement from quarterly to semi-annually, Contra Costa County has started using the Restoration Waiver, which effectively grants a grace period for recertification without requiring a full re-application.

EHSD has implemented an Integrated Voice Response System ("IVR") which further streamlines the application and recertification processes. It allows participants to review their eligibility and CalFresh benefits toll free, 24 hours a day. This system will be expanded to include other self-service oriented assistance, such as replacement form requests, address changes and similar needs.

Similar to the IVR, benefits recipients are now reminded of the need for recertification by automated phone calls. EHSD has recently introduced a system called "PROMPTLY" that sends text messages regarding appointments to CalWORKS recipients. It is working well and EHSD plans to roll it out for CalFresh by June 2015 to send appointment reminders, requests for needed documentation, and similar notifications to applicants and recipients who agree to receive texts and provide a cell number.

Website and telephone access are both relatively user-friendly and offer alternative language options, though a few omissions were noted:

- Website and phone both offer options to find an office, as does the "Call 211" service, but no directions are provided by phone, even though "location and directions" is one of the phone menu options. The "Call 211" service does not assist with, or even send out, applications, but only refers the caller to a CalFresh office, providing the phone number of the nearest office.

- Neither website nor phone mentions 511, which can assist callers with finding public transit, even though many prospective applicants may not have a car and need public transit.

Use of newer internet-based communication modes such as Skype, Facetime, and Oovoo, could also make the applications process more accessible. While face-to-face interviews are no longer required to finalize eligibility, those applicants who try to apply by mail often have questions or need help. They can call an office to get assistance, but many would feel more comfortable and confident in their understanding of the assistance if they could see the person with whom they are speaking, which is possible through those alternative internet communication modes. A good example of a situation where these technologies could enhance the contact would be where an applicant seeks to contact the newly-created position of EHSD Ombudsperson. EHSD does not currently use these alternative modes of communication, but EHSD is aware of the potential advantages, although it has not reached a decision concerning their use at this time.

EHSD has recently contracted with a consultant who has extensive experience with CalFresh, to identify effective outreach strategies and to streamline intake processes and procedures. This is expected to improve the customer experience and expedite enrollment. Contracting with the experienced consultant is also expected to facilitate the enrollment of more people in the program while maintaining service standards.

Service is measured by the time it takes EHSD to determine eligibility and make benefits available to qualifying households, as well as its error ratio in making these determinations. On June 9, 2014, EHSD reported that it exceeded the timeliness standard of 90% within 30 days, with 93% of applications handled and benefits made available within 30 days. An award from the State, dated September 4, 2014, shows EHSD's error rate was 4.13%, compared to 3.63% for the State as a whole and the national average of 3.20%.

This ability to maintain service and quality control standards while handling an increased number of new applications and active cases may be impacted by a reduction in budgeted staffing for the coming year. Last year, EHSD had budgeted staff of 159 Full-Time Equivalents ("FTE's"), but had a large number of vacancies. EHSD had to temporarily reallocate staff and resources and resort to overtime to handle last year's workloads. This year's budget is 136 FTE's, which is very close to last year's actual FTE number. It is uncertain whether the temporary measures that sufficed to handle last year's CalFresh volume will be adequate to handle a greater volume. The number of new applications and active cases are both expected to increase significantly over the next 12 months to meet the May 2016 target participation.

EHSD has also recently entered into a contract with a renowned specialist in CalFresh, who is newly retired from a county with a CalFresh participation rate of 82%. This specialist's primary responsibility is to assist the County in preparing for state and/or

federal CalFresh program performance reviews, and in developing and assisting in implementation of any necessary corrective action plans needed as a result. An important outgrowth of his work will be the further lowering of EHSD's error rate, even as intake and eligibility processes are streamlined.

The Alliance to Transform CalFresh recommends supplementing outreach efforts with "in-reach". In-reach refers to cross-program, cross-unit and cross-departmental communication and cooperation. There is currently a strong cross-program relationship between Medi-Cal and CalFresh due to the largely-coinciding eligibility for each program that allows for a large degree of automatic enrollment between these two programs. The current application is multipurpose for both these programs.

Beyond Medi-Cal, cross-program referrals occur on a widely varying basis. Knowledge and awareness of CalFresh is much more prevalent in some programs than others. Often whether cross-program referrals are made depends largely upon the presence of workers with many years of experience in various capacities in the County. Cross-program referrals are important because CalFresh is only one element of support for a population that has needs on multiple fronts. Many of those other needs are addressed by other programs which may be handled by other County departments. Coordination between those programs, with sharing of resources, enables the County to meet a greater range of needs more efficiently.

EHSD recognized this need for greater efficiency and so made "Communication" one of their five major initiatives in their Strategic Plan for 2014. The intent was to open channels of communication and encourage cooperation between the various need-based programs administered by different departments. By promoting interdepartmental communication, the goal is to increase knowledge of the benefits provided by and eligibility criteria for programs administered by other departments since many of these programs serve the same populations. Examples of workers from various County departments who work in need-based programs include, but are not limited to, all public health workers, workers in the variety of programs that support foster children and transitional youth, and workers in the variety of programs that support seniors.

Ultimately this interdepartmental communication would be expected to result in recognition of common purpose among these programs that all exist to provide essential support to County residents who have multiple, often-interrelated needs. When this communication leads to cooperative sharing of resources, the County can serve County residents more effectively and efficiently.

Eventually a strong "needs-based" rather than "specific program-based" mindset develops. All resources can then focus on fully supporting County residents in need, with fewer constraints imposed by the limitations of individual programs.

In conclusion, all available and potential resources are needed if the County is to achieve its goals for 2015 – 2016. One of these goals, and an important one, is achieving a 75% participation rate for CalFresh, and receiving the multiple benefits for the County that higher participation generates.

FINDINGS

- F1. While the County is continually working to increase the number of applicants and to remove barriers to successful recertification, to reach the May 2016 targeted participation rate of 75%, the County needs to increase the number of new CalFresh applications by more outreach work and also maintain the number of ongoing cases by removing barriers to recertification.
- F2. Current CalFresh Partners Group membership does not include any representatives of local businesses such as business associations and/or Chambers of Commerce, area farmers markets, or cities with high concentrations of prospective CalFresh recipients.
- F3. Business associations, farmers' markets and cities, which have the knowledge, experience, and connections to local businesses to offer marketing ideas and outreach support, have a vested interest in increasing CalFresh participation due to the economic gains to the community generated by CalFresh funds.
- F4. The County could do more to increase outreach to seniors and low-income families with children — both targeted populations for CalFresh outreach -- whether by EHSD direction to the CalFresh Partners Group or directly by EHSD.
- F5. Long lag times to fill vacancies coupled with the reduction in budgeted FTE staffing for 2015-16 likely will constrain the ability of EHSD to achieve and successfully handle the number of new CalFresh applications and ongoing cases needed to reach the May 2016 targeted participation rate of 75%.
- F6. The exterior signage at district offices lacks consistency and some do not include hours of operation or identification of a CalFresh presence inside the building. Some district offices also lack clear directions inside the building to CalFresh information and applications.
- F7. EHSD likely could resolve more application issues and finalize eligibility determinations at offsite enrollment events if their tablets could access existing applications remotely.
- F8. Firewall issues, not yet resolved by the County's Department of Information and Technology, are impeding remote access to existing applications by tablet.

- F9. EHSD might benefit from increasing its use of newer modes of communication, including text messaging and internet-based modes such as Skype, Facetime and Oovoo.
- F10. The County's Department of Information and Technology can support EHSD's work by investigating, implementing, and supporting newer modes of communication.
- F11. With some simple improvements to the phone answering menu and the public website for CalFresh, potential applicants could more easily access information and/or assistance with the enrollment process.
- F12. As County workers gain more knowledge about the benefits and eligibility criteria for various programs administered by different County departments, cross-program, cross-department referrals will likely increase, as well as participation in CalFresh.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The County should organize an event to educate select city managers, economic development officers and local Chambers of Commerce representatives about (a) the economic gains to be realized from increased CalFresh participation, and (b) how to sponsor their own local enrollment events, after identifying funds to do so.
- R2. The County should recruit representatives of local businesses, such as business associations and/or Chambers of Commerce, area farmers markets, and cities with high concentrations of prospective CalFresh recipients for membership in the CalFresh Partners Group.
- R3. The County should issue a press release announcing May as CalFresh month and emphasizing the economic gains for local businesses that result from increased CalFresh participation. In addition to other local newspapers, the press release should be sent to the Contra Costa County edition of *the Chamber Link*, the weekly newsletter of the Association of Chambers of Commerce, which reaches over 10,000 recipients in Contra Costa County.
- R4. The County should extend CalFresh enrollment outreach to schools, senior centers, and senior housing, either directly or through the CalFresh Partners Group, after identifying funds to do so.
- R5. After identifying the necessary funds, the County should return budgeted FTE staffing for EHSD to last year's levels, and use County temps as necessary to meet and maintain that staffing level after determining the legality of doing so.

- R6. After identifying the necessary funds, the County should fast-track the current project to streamline the recruitment and hiring processes by Human Resources, after considering the various legal requirements governing the County's recruitment and hiring.
- R7. Within 60 days, the County should correct the signage at office locations with CalFresh information and application intake capability to include the hours of operation and notice of CalFresh (or "Food Stamps") presence outside of the building, and directions to CalFresh information or service (preferably bilingual) inside the office if no greeter or knowledgeable receptionist is present.
- R8. The County through its Department of Information and Technology should (a) prioritize the resolution of firewall issues that currently prevent remote access of existing CalFresh applications; (b) support EHSD's expansion of the text messaging system, "PROMPTLY" to CalFresh; (c) investigate feasibility of internet-based communication modes such as Skype for EHSD, (d) add a link to 511 to the CalFresh website, and (e) mention 511 in the menu options in the automated telephone answering system, after identifying funds to do so.
- R9. The County should schedule a series of meetings between those departments that administer need-based programs to explicitly encourage increase cross-program referrals.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

	<u>Findings</u>	<u>Recommendations</u>
Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors	1 - 12	1 - 9

APPENDIX 1

Contra Costa County

Employment and Human Services Department

EHSD
SPEAKERS EVENTS BUREAU
CALENDAR OF EVENTS / ENGAGEMENTS
August 2014 – February 2015

	Date	Event	Time	Location	Sponsor(s)	Materials/ Equipment	EHSD Role
1	Wednesday 8/6/2014	Project Homeless Connect	9:00 am-3:00 pm	Richmond	County Homeless Program and Community Organizations		Provided information at designated table and took 19 Medi-Cal application/25 CalFresh applications
	Description:	Annual event with the goals of (1) improving access to services and housing; (2) improving the homeless system of care and (3) increasing awareness and securing community involvement, commitment and investment in ending homelessness. Service providers on site.					
2	Friday and Saturday 9/12-9/13 2014	East Bay Stand Down	9:00 am-4:00 pm both days	Alameda Fair Grounds	East Bay Stand Down	Flyers, Brochures, Medi-Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, laptops and iPads with remote, secure access to CalWin and MEDS	EHSD table with printed information in English and Spanish, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems,
	Description:	Bi-annual event that provides services and information to homeless and at-risk Veterans from the 9- County Bay Area. Vets are connected with services that range from VA Healthcare to Dental to Mental Healthcare, housing, meals, legal and other services and resources.					
3	Saturday 10/4/2014	Carnival of Health 2014 / Carnaval de Salud 2014	11:00 am 3:00 pm	Meadow Homes Park - Concord	Monument Impact Center in collaboration with the City of Concord, Kaiser Permanente, John Muir Health, La Clinica and other agencies serving residents of the Monument Community	Flyers, Brochures, Medi- Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, Laptops and iPads with remote secure access to CalWin and MEDS	EHSD table with printed information in Spanish and English, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems. Three Spanish-speaking representatives from EHSD.
	Description:	Free health screening and educational information for low-income residents in Concord who lack health care insurance and access to the medical system. The majority of residents attending the fair are Latino. (2013 attendance was 1,134 per Web Site.)					
4	Saturday 11/15/2014	Health Richmond Asian Pacific Islander Health Enrollment Event	10:00 am- 2:00 pm	Richmond Memorial Auditorium & Convention Center	Health Richmond, the California Endowment, Covered California and others	Flyers, Brochures, Medi-Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, Laptops and iPads with remote, secure access to CalWin and MEDS.	EHSD table with printed information in English and Spanish, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems. One Spanish speaking representative from EHSD.
	Description:	First Collaboration of its kind in Richmond – health enrollment event for Asian Pacific Islander Community. Translators for more than 15 languages on site.					
5	Saturday 11/22/2014	Contra Costa ACA Team Health Enrollment Event	10:00 am- 1:00 pm	Concord Library	Contra ACA Team	Flyers, Brochures, Medi-Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, Laptops and iPads with remote, secure access to CalWin and MEDS.	EHSD table with printed information in English and Spanish, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems,
	Description:	First of a series of health enrollment events sponsored by Contra Costa ACA Team to be held at the Concord Library during ACA Open Enrollment period.					

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	Date	Event	Time	Location	Sponsor(s)	Materials/ Equipment	EHSD Role
6	Saturday 12/13/2014	Contra Costa ACA Team Health Enrollment Event	10:00 am- 1:00 pm	Concord Library	Contra ACA Team	Flyers, Brochures, Medi-Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, Laptops and iPads with remote, secure access to CalWin and MEDS.	EHSD table with printed information in English and Spanish, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems,
Description:		Ongoing series of health enrollment events sponsored by Contra Costa ACA Team to be held at the Concord Library during ACA Open Enrollment period.					
7	Friday 1/9/2015	Covered California Roundtable	1:00 -4:00 pm	City of Richmond Council Chambers	Covered California		EHSD reps will present a 5 minute update on Contra Costa efforts and will be prepared for Q&A session.
Description:		Quarterly event during Open Enrollment, hosted by County staff, Covered California. Attended by CBOs, Certified Enrollment Counselors and representatives from legislators' offices.					
8	Saturday 1/10/15	Contra Costa ACA Team Health Enrollment Event	10:00 am- 1:00 pm	Concord Library	Contra Costa ACA Team	Flyers, Brochures, Medi-Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, laptops and iPads with remote, secure access to CalWin and MEDS	EHSD table with printed information in English and Spanish, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems,
Description:		Ongoing series of health enrollment events sponsored by Contra Costa ACA Team to be held at the Concord Library during ACA Open Enrollment period.					
9	Saturday 1/24/2015	Contra Costa ACA Team Health Enrollment Event	10:00 am - 1:00 pm	Concord Library	Contra Costa ACA Team	Flyers, Brochures, Medi-Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, laptops and iPads with remote, secure access to CalWin and MEDS	EHSD table with printed information in English and Spanish, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems,
Description:		Ongoing series of health enrollment events sponsored by Contra Costa ACA Team to be held at the Concord Library during ACA Open Enrollment period.					
10	Monday 1/26/15	Contra Costa ACA Team Health Enrollment Event	4:00 – 7:00 pm	San Pablo Library	Contra Costa ACA Team	Flyers, Brochures, Medi-Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, Laptops and iPads with remote, secure access to CalWin and MEDS.	EHSD table with printed information in English and Spanish, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems,
Description:		Ongoing series of health enrollment events sponsored by Contra Costa ACA Team to be held at the San Pablo Library during ACA Open Enrollment period.					
11	Saturday 1/31/15	Monument Impact Enrollment Event	10:00 am- 1:00 pm	Monument Impact, Concord	Monument Impact, Contra Costa ACA Team	Flyers, Brochures, Medi-Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, Laptops and iPads with remote, secure access to CalWin and MEDS.	EHSD table with printed information in English and Spanish, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems,
Description:		Enrollment event at Monument Impact, focused on Latino community.					

EHSD
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	Date	Event	Time	Location	Sponsor(s)	Materials/ Equipment	EHSD Role
12	Saturday 2/7/15	Get Covered Contra Costa!	11:00 am- 2:00 pm	Pacific East Mall, Richmond	Healthy Richmond	Flyers, Brochures, Medi-Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, laptops and iPads with remote, secure access to CalWin and MEDS	EHSD table with printed information in English and Spanish, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems.
	Description:	Enrollment event focused on Asian Pacific Islander communities.					
13	Saturday 2/14/15	Let's Get Covered, San Pablo!	10:00 am- 2:00 pm	Maple Hall Community Center, San Pablo	City of San Pablo, Contra Costa ACA Team, SEIU-UHW	Flyers, Brochures, Medi-Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, laptops and iPads with remote, secure access to CalWin and MEDS	EHSD table with printed information in English and Spanish, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems.
	Description:	Community health enrollment event. Free blood pressure checks will also be offered on site.					
14	Saturday 2/14/15	Contra Costa ACA Team Health Enrollment Event	10:00 am- 1:00 pm	Concord Library	Contra Costa ACA Team	Flyers, Brochures, Medi-Cal and CalFresh applications, Denti-Cal information, laptops and iPads with remote, secure access to CalWin and MEDS	EHSD table with printed information in English and Spanish, staff assistance and remote access to EHSD systems,
	Description	Ongoing series of health enrollment events sponsored by Contra Costa ACA Team to be held at the Concord Library during ACA Open Enrollment period.					

WFS Policy CalFresh Outreach Activities FFY 10/1/2014 – 9/30/2015

Date	Event
10/02/14	CalFresh Liaisons identified to provide Food Bank staff with assistance when working with applicants in the field
10/15/14	Facts & Myths Presentation at the Food Bank – 30 partners from various agencies doing outreach for CalFresh (3 hr. presentation)
10/30/14	District Office visit with CalFresh partners/Food Bank staff (3 hr.)
11/06/14	Staff Development training for CalFresh Partners – Basic CalFresh Overview
11/13/14	CalFresh Partners Meeting Representatives from the community (1.5 hr. monthly meeting)
1/22/15	Facts & Myths Presentation at the Food Bank – 25 partners from various agencies doing outreach for CalFresh
2/12/15	CalFresh Partners Meeting – Representatives from the community
3/04/15	Partners Meeting at the Food Bank – in-depth training on a selected topic about 20-25 attendees from various agencies (2 hr. training session)
3/17/15	CalFresh Forum in Sacramento (all day event)
3/20/15	Joint presentation (Facts & Myths) with Solano County at the Food Bank Agency Summit
6/10/15	Facts & Myths Presentation at the Food Bank for various partners doing CF Outreach
8/12/15	Partners Meeting – in-depth training on selected topic for about 20-25 attendees from various agencies (2hrs.)
9/29/15	Facts & Myths Presentation at the Food Bank (3 hr. presentation)

APPENDIX 2:

Contra Costa County CalFresh Cases, by Zip Code

January 8, 2015

Zip	Main City	CalFresh Cases
94507	Alamo	36
94509	Antioch	5156
94531	Antioch	1639
94511	Bethel Island	155
	Brentwood	1117
94514	Byron	33
94516	Canyon	7
94517	Clayton	72
94518	Concord	566
94519	Concord	439
94520	Concord	1671
94521	Concord	643
94522	Concord	31
94524	Concord	22
94529	Concord	1
94525	Crockett	107
94526	Danville	89
94528	Diablo	1
94530	El Cerrito	253
94803	El Sobrante	679
94820	El Sobrante	20
94547	Hercules	624
94548	Knightsen	28
94549	Lafayette	108
94553	Martinez	1038
94556	Moraga	32
94561	Oakley	1330
94563	Orinda	48
94564	Pinole	442
94565	Pittsburg/BayPoint	5218
94523	Pleasant Hill	624
94566	Pleasanton	8
94569	Port Costa	4
94801	Richmond	3008

Workforce Development Board/One Stop – 4545
Delta Fair Blvd., Antioch, CA 94509

Potential for enrollment events

Workforce Services – 151 Sand Creek Rd.,
Brentwood, CA 94513

Potential for enrollment events.

Potential for enrollment events.

Workforce Services - 151 Linus Pauling,
Hercules, CA 94547

Potential for enrollment events

Potential for enrollment events

Service Integration Team (SIT Site) –33105
Willow Pass Rd, Bay Point, CA 94565
Workforce Services and Aging & Adult Services -
400 Ellinwood Way, Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

Service Integration Team (SIT Site) –1535 Fred
Jackson Way, Richmond, CA 94801 and

94802	Richmond	31
94804	Richmond	2449
94805	Richmond	398
94807	Richmond	5
94808	Richmond	6
94572	Rodeo	459
94806	San Pablo	2648
94582	San Ramon	165
94583	San Ramon	129
94595	Walnut Creek	69
94596	Walnut Creek	187
94597	Walnut Creek	177
94598	Walnut Creek	102
TOTAL		32104

Workforce Services and Aging & Adult Services -
1305 Macdonald Ave., Richmond, CA 94801

Children & Family Services, Workforce Services -
1275 A Hall Ave., Richmond, CA 94804

Potential for enrollment events