

A. CalFresh Population Overview and Needs Assessment

1. Size and Characteristics of CalFresh Population

*Provide an overview of the size and characteristics of both the total CalFresh recipient populations in the local/area region and the CalFresh E&T participant populations, if CalFresh E&T is available in the local area/region (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, age, Limited English Proficient (LEP), foreign born, formerly incarcerated, etc.).**

As of November 30, 2018, there were 24,228 individual CalFresh participants in Contra Costa County, equal to approximately 2.0% of the total population of the county. The participant population is 35% male and 65% female. Of adult CalFresh recipients, 76% are between the ages of 19 and 49, and 24% are from age 49 to 64. Of the adult CalFresh population, slightly more than 1% have limited English proficiency, and 1.9% are not citizens of the United States.¹

An important CalFresh target population for employment and training supports are those identified as ABAWDs (Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents), who became subject to work requirements during the welfare reform process in the 1980s.² Since the great recession in 2008, ABAWDs in Contra Costa County have had a waiver of work requirements due to higher than average unemployment rates in the county. However, in September 2019, the federal waiver of work requirement for ABAWDs will expire for Contra Costa County. The County Employment and Human Services Policy and Planning Division estimates that between 3,900 to 4,600 individuals classified as ABAWDs will be at risk of losing their CalFresh benefits unless they can begin meeting the requirement that they be enrolled in an employment and training program or employed for at least 80 hours per month.³ The ABAWD population includes 61% male and 39% female. According to County data, 33% of this group is Black/African American, 29% are white, 14% are Hispanic or Latino, 4% are Asian, 2% are multiracial, 4% are "Other" and 14% are identified as "Unknown." The age distribution of the population includes: 20 and younger: 8%, 21 to 30: 38%, 31 to 40: 28%, and 41 to 50: 25%. Data show that 98% of the ABAWD population in Contra Costa County is proficient in English, and that 2% are Spanish speakers, with fewer than 1% who have another primary language. In the category of citizenship, just 3% of those classified as ABAWDs are non-citizens.

CalFresh E&T has been available to residents of Contra Costa County for a number of years, although it has included a relatively small number of participants, in part due to the voluntary nature of the program. The small scale is also due to the lack of capacity among local providers to support the necessary administrative overhead and also provide eligible 50% matching funds in order to receive reimbursement. In Federal Fiscal Year 2017 there were a total of 88 CalFresh E&T participants in Contra Costa County, of whom 30% were female and 70% were male. Within that group, 45% were Black/African American, 30% were White, 10% were multiracial, 8% identified as "Other", 3% Asian, and 2% American Indian or Alaska Native. In addition, 18% of the group identified as Hispanic or Latino. The age range of participants was as follows: 18 to 35: 48%, 36 to 49: 41%, 50 to 59: 9%, and 60 or older: 2%. Among current

¹ Data provided by Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department, Workforce Services Division on December 19, 2018.

² The ABAWD classification includes adult CalFresh recipients between the ages of 18 and 49 who are considered able-bodied and do not have dependent children.

³ Fact Sheet: Contra Costa County CalFresh Recipients May be Facing ABAWD Time Limits Previously Waived, Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department, Policy and Planning Division, March 2018, for internal distribution.

participants in CalFresh E&T programs in Contra Costa County, 100% are English proficient.⁴

2. Workforce Services Needed

*Assess the types of workforce services needed to help people receiving CalFresh succeed in the regional and local labor market, including those services that are eligible for 50% federal reimbursement from CalFresh E&T (e.g. ESL classes, work experience, apprenticeship).**

CalFresh recipients in Contra Costa County who are able to work have multiple challenges to success in the regional and local labor market. Many have a limited work history, lack a high school diploma or GED, lack stable housing, and have physical or mental health challenges. These characteristics of the CalFresh population have particular implications for the types of workforce services that are most beneficial. While optimal outcomes can be obtained by participating in sector-based training, many CalFresh participants need a more basic level of workforce and other supportive services that can include remedial education, basic/essential skills training, and social emotional skills required to navigate the workplace.

A history with the criminal justice system and limited English proficiency represent other challenges common to the CalFresh population. Based upon their differing circumstances, CalFresh recipients have the need for a range of workforce services. Each individual is unique, and it is critical that services be tailored specifically to meet individual needs.

For individuals who lack previous experience in the workplace, training in basic or essential skills is critical to helping them function effectively in the workplace. These skills include effective communication with customers, fellow employees, and supervisors.

Those with educational limitations may require support in obtaining a GED or high school diploma, or may need more basic literacy instruction. Adult Education programs associated with local school districts in the county offer support in obtaining a GED or high school diploma, and other community based organizations can provide literacy support. Limited English proficiency CalFresh recipients can also be served by Adult Education and these community based partners.

As the WDBCCC expands the array of workforce services accessible to CalFresh recipients, it will be guided by the following best practices identified in a recent report by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support:

- Services are based on an individualized assessment of the workforce-related strengths and weaknesses of SNAP clients;
- Services comprehensively address an individual's need for skills training, basic skills education, and overcoming barriers to employment;
- Services help participants earn credentials valued by employers in their chosen industry or sector; and
- Services help develop skills that are closely linked to labor market demands in the local area.⁵

3. Employment Barriers

Describe the employment barriers experienced by people receiving CalFresh in your local area/region, including potential barriers faced by people with disabilities, and resources that can be utilized to assist

⁴ Data provided by the California Community College Foundation on December 12, 2018.

⁵ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E & T) Best Practices Study: Final Report, USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, November 2016.

*with overcoming these barriers, including those resources eligible for 50% federal reimbursement from CalFresh E&T (e.g. job readiness, child care, criminal history).**

While the majority of those who receive SNAP/CalFresh benefits have a strong commitment to participating in the workforce, there are significant barriers that prevent them from doing so. These barriers were identified by both participants in public forums throughout the county, as well as in a recent national study on SNAP recipients. Perhaps the most important barrier is a lack of recent work experience. In a recent study, more than two-thirds (68 percent) of non-employed SNAP recipients had not worked in the past 18 months.⁶ The longer an individual remains outside the workforce, the more difficult it becomes to reenter.

Physical and mental health conditions were identified by public meeting participants as another major impediment to successful employment. A substantial portion of people on SNAP/CalFresh have a physical, mental, or other health condition that limits their capacity for work. National data show this number to be close to half of all participants.⁷

Limited education is another barrier experienced by a significant number of CalFresh recipients in Contra Costa County. More than 30 percent of SNAP recipients lack a high school diploma, and 9 percent have not completed the eighth grade.⁸ In an era where job requirements for education and training continue to grow, this represents a major hindrance to successfully entering the job market.

Taking care of children or other individuals was mentioned multiple times as a barrier to employment in the public forums and in the national study. Nearly one quarter of SNAP participants nationally had at least one child younger than 3-years-old.⁹ The cost of childcare can easily account for a majority of the earnings for someone in an entry-level job or less than full time employment.

Limited access to transportation is frequently identified by CalFresh recipients as a barrier, with public transportation unavailable or requiring an inordinate amount of time to get to training or the workplace. This barrier is particularly acute for individuals living in the eastern portion of the county.

A range of resources eligible for CalFresh E&T 50% reimbursement are available through the existing CalFresh E&T program in Contra Costa County. These include:

- Case management, including goal setting
- Participant assessments
- Pre-employment job readiness training
- Career skills training, including job search, communication skills, career advancement
- Resume and application preparation support
- Interview preparation
- Placement assistance including referrals to sector based employment
- College orientation and success planning

⁶ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participants' Employment Characteristics and Barriers to Work, Mathematica Policy Research, James Mabli, Irina Cheban, July 19, 2017.

⁷ The Mathematica study found that 49% of individuals receiving SNAP fell into this category, p. 27.

⁸ Ibid, page 28.

⁹ Ibid, page 28.

- Financial education and financial coaching
- Vocational training for administrative careers (Opportunity Junction)

Participant reimbursements for the following costs related to CalFresh E&T are also available:

- Dependent care to enable participation in CalFresh E&T activities
- Transportation to training or work
- Clothing and tools required for training, interviews or work
- Emergency housing assistance and one-time utility payments
- Legal services related to housing, employment and expungement
- Medical expenses as required for employment
- Test and registration fees such as GED

4. Current and Prospective Local Partnerships

*Explain current and prospective local partnerships, including partnerships with local workforce development boards, local Human Service Agencies, and other CalFresh E&T providers, including those that are eligible for 50% federal reimbursement from CalFresh E&T (e.g. community colleges, community-based organizations, and other third-party providers). Describe the quality and level of intensity of services provided by these partners.**

The WDBCCC recently participated as a member of the Core Planning Team for a process in Contra Costa County designed to prepare for the expiration of the ABAWD work requirement waiver in the county. As a result, the WDBCCC has been able to become better informed about CalFresh and CalFresh E&T. It has also forged stronger relationships with key partners providing workforce services for those participating in CalFresh, including the following:

- Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services-Workforce Services department, which provides assessments for CalFresh eligibility and maintains data on CalFresh participants in the County.
- Rubicon Programs, which serves as one of the two CalFresh E&T providers in the county, using AB109 matching funds to focus services on individuals experiencing reentry. Rubicon served a total of 74 CalFresh E&T participants in 2017.
- Opportunity Junction, an east county CalFresh E&T provider. Opportunity Junction provided CalFresh E&T services to 14 participants in 2017.; and
- The California Community College Foundation, which serves as an intermediary for CalFresh E&T providers in Contra Costa County.

The WDBCCC will build upon these strengthened relationships to better provide WIOA services to CalFresh participants.

The WDBCCC is currently engaged in the next stage of the process of planning for the expiration of the ABAWD work requirement waiver, participating in two multi-stakeholder workgroups involved in planning and implementation. The first group is focused on the expansion of CalFresh E&T provider capacity in Contra Costa County, will be planning outreach to potential CalFresh E&T providers, assessing their capacity to serve in this role, and providing support as needed. The second workgroup and providing outreach and assessments to CalFresh recipients to determine who may be eligible for exemptions.

5. Information Sharing to Evaluate Need

*Describe the ways in which program partners will facilitate information sharing to evaluate need.**

The WDBCCC will continue to expand its collaboration and information sharing with staff in Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services-Workforce Services who are responsible for the CalFresh program. Participation in the CalFresh E&T workgroup will also help the WDBCCC to keep fully updated on the development of new workforce services for the CalFresh population. As a result, the WDBCCC will better understand the workforce services needs of the CalFresh population, and can plan for delivery of Concord AJCC/One Stop services to meet those needs.

The WDBCCC will share information with the backbone organization for CalFresh E&T in Contra Costa County, the California Community College Foundation, regarding its planned expansion of CalFresh E&T capacity in the county. This will enable the WDBCCC to determine how it can best provide support to CalFresh E&T participants through WIOA-funded services. Because demand for CalFresh E&T services in Contra Costa County will increase significantly following the expiration of the ABAWD waiver in September of 2019, this will be a particularly important time to strengthen information sharing regarding needed services.

B. Assessment of Need and Population Size for Non-Custodial Parents

1. Child Support Program Population Overview

Provide an overview of the size of the Child Support Program population in your local area including the following:

- *An assessment of areas of high concentration.*
- *The percentage of noncustodial parents who are unemployed.*
- *The percentage of noncustodial parents who are ex-offenders.*
- *To the extent feasible, demographic information including race, ethnicity, gender, etc.**

There are 25,274 open cases with non-custodial parents (NPs) in Contra Costa County; 9,500 of those individuals have a physical address in the county. Of those local individuals, 3,707 (39%) have no active employment record¹⁰ and 1,936 of these individuals (20.4%) have a current or past record of incarceration.

With regard to sex, 89.8% of NPs are male while 9.86% of NPs are female, and 0.34% are unknown. In addition, 26.99% of NPs are African-American, 29.73% are Hispanic, 22.64% are white, 14.84% are unknown, fewer than 5% are Asian or Pacific-Islander, and 0.2% are Native American or Alaskan Native.

The table below shows the areas of the county with the highest concentrations of NPs. These areas are largely concentrated in the eastern and western portions of the county.

Table 1: Cities in Contra Costa County with Highest Concentration of Non-custodial Parents			
	Percentage of Total County Population	Percentage of Total Child Support	Location in County

¹⁰ An active employment record is an indicator that Contra Costa County Department of Child Support Services received information of an active relationship between the non-custodial parent and an employer and has not received subsequent information informing them that the employment status has changed.

		Population	
Bay Point	1.97%	4.49%	East County
San Pablo	2.72%	6.05%	West County
Pittsburg	6.29%	13.04%	East County
Antioch	9.74%	19.01%	East County
Richmond	9.59%	16.54%	West County
El Sobrante	1.10%	1.69%	West County
Oakley	3.64%	5.12%	East County
Martinez	3.35%	4.31%	Central County

2. Services Needed

*Provide an assessment of the types of services needed for each targeted group challenged with meeting their parental responsibilities.**

- *Describe the relative importance of the types of services needed to help program participants succeed in the labor market.**

This population faces the challenge of needing to earn a sufficient wage to both provide child support and pay for the cost of living in a region with a skyrocketing cost of living. Many non-custodial parents are underemployed or sporadically employed, and have low levels of education, making it even more challenging to secure employment and earn sufficient wages. Individuals with a history of incarceration face a particular challenge because they often have substantial child support payments in arrears when they are released from prison.

The populations in Contra Costa County have need for a variety of services to help them in meeting their parental responsibilities. Some of the most critical services for this population include the following:

1. Support to obtain a GED in order to better qualify for positions
2. Support and training to gain basic skills and other essential skills required to be successful in the workplace
3. Improved tracking of Child Support participants and coordination with them to set payment amounts at an appropriate level

Additional services that would be useful for this population include:

1. English as a Second Language instruction for those who are learning English.
2. Sector-based training so people can obtain higher paying jobs.
3. Legal assistance in renegotiating the terms of their child support obligation so that it is an appropriate amount in relation to their financial circumstances.
4. Greater communication between the Child Support Program and partners, including the WDBCCC, regarding client participation in training programs, to inform decisions on renegotiating terms of child support obligations until the individual has become employed.
5. Realistic financial planning support.

Overall, there is a need for a less punitive approach to working with non-custodial parents that encourages employment and can lead to better outcomes for everyone involved. In addition, there is a need for enhanced identification of individuals who are *willing* to pay child support, but are financially unable. Since motivation is a key element to success in workforce training and

employment, these individuals could then be more strongly targeted for workforce services, compared to other groups.

3. Services Currently Provided

*Describe the types of baseline services that are currently being provided in the local area to individuals from the Child Support Program population and how the regional and/or local plans will modify the types and quantity of services provided.**

Non-custodial parents (NPs) are included among the population of those who receive services from the Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County (WDBCCC), but the WDBCCC has not separately tracked those individuals in the past. The WDBCCC and partners do provide services that may benefit individual members of the Child Support program population, such as reentry and financial mobility services.

The WDBCCC will work with the Child Support Program (CSP) to better coordinate efforts to work with NPs. The CSP will work on improved identification of NPs who would benefit from workforce services, and on referring those individuals to the appropriate supportive services. The WDBCCC and partners will also start tracking NPs so they can improve communication and coordination with the CSP and make it easier for the CSP to track individual's employment status.

4. Barriers Experienced by Child Support Program Participants

*Describe barriers experienced by Child Support Program participants in your local area, including potential barriers faced by people with disabilities.**

- *What existing resources can be utilized to assist with overcoming these barriers?**

Child Support Program (CSP) participants in Contra Costa County face a variety of barriers to meeting their parental responsibilities.

First, many individuals face challenges such as the extremely high cost of housing, a suspended drivers license (as a result of delinquent child support payments), substance abuse, domestic violence, and/or bad credit history and difficulty accessing low-interest loans.

In addition, many individuals in this population face barriers to becoming employed. Undocumented, formerly incarcerated, and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities all face specific challenges to employment, as described elsewhere in this plan, which can compound the challenges faced in securing a job that allows the individual to meet their child support payments.

The CSP also faces barriers in effectively serving this population. CSP cannot spend their funding on direct services. In addition, the program faces significant challenges in communicating with case participants about updates to their employment status. Participants often do not realize they need to communicate updates or choose not to out of fear of losing wages to child support payments.

There are a wealth of resources in Contra Costa County available to support job seekers that could benefit non-custodial parents seeking employment. The CSP could better support program participants in addressing their barriers to employment by being more aware of these services and resources, and by implementing systems to better identify participants that may be eligible for or would benefit from those services. Some of the existing resources that could help non-custodial parents address their barriers to employment include:

1. **Opportunity Junction** provides comprehensive financial services, job training, career counseling, and placement assistance. Their services can be useful to individuals with a

past history of incarceration and other individuals with limited employment history or employable skills.

2. **SparkPoint Centers** are financial education centers. The services focus in three areas: managing credit, increasing income (from accessing public benefits to finding a good job), and building savings and assets for financial literacy. These services could help non-custodial parents establish greater financial stability, which would help them with meeting child support payments and get support in finding a good job.
3. **Free and low cost adult education resources** offered by school districts and community colleges throughout the county.
4. **Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act** funding of up to \$5,000 for individual training, including case management and supportive services.
5. **Fidelity Bonding Program** through the Employment Development Department, which can help individuals with low credit become bonded. This can help individuals increase their employability.
6. **Pell Grants** to support further education.

5. Information Sharing to Evaluate Need

*Describe the ways in which program partners will facilitate information sharing to evaluate need.**

To best evaluate the needs of this population, the Child Support Program (CSP) will identify individuals that would benefit from training and employment support and will connect those individuals with WDBCCC and other partners for assessment and delivery of needed workforce services. The WDBCCC will also work with the CSP to establish a communication pathway for updating CSP staff on the progress of clients in workforce training, employment, and retention. To support this, the WDBCCC will amend their intake process to track whether they are working with a non-custodial parent and will get necessary permissions from participants so they can share information with CSP, depending on confidentiality requirements. The WDBCCC has taken part in initial conversations on setting up a system to enable those who are working towards employment to get temporary relief on their child support payments. Finally, the WDBCCC will coordinate with other relevant partners that serve this population to better identify needs and track progress.

C. Partnerships and Engagement to Increase Competitive Integrated Employment for Jobseekers with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD)

1. Engagement with Local Partners

*Explain how your area is engaged or plans to become engaged with local partners to increase CIE for jobseekers with ID/DD.**

The Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County (WDBCCC) has existing partnerships with several organizations, in an effort to increase Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) for jobseekers with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD). Current partnerships include: Adult Education programs through West Contra Costa Unified School District and Mt. Diablo Unified School District (WCCUSD), Earn and Learn, Regional Center, Futures Explored, East Bay Innovations, the Department of Rehabilitation, Employer Advisory Council, and Bridges to Success. Potential partners include Best Buddies, Adult Living Center, Commercial Support Services, Toolworks., and Green Ridge.

One example of WDBCCC work in this area includes current implementation of a grant from the California Employment Development Department for the Disability Employment Accelerator

grant. Through this grant the WDBCCC serves a diverse population that includes: 1) People with intellectual and developmental disabilities, 2) Those with physical disabilities, and 3) Veterans with disabilities. This project seeks to accelerate employment for people with disabilities (PWD) in regional high-demand industry sectors through three key strategies: 1) Developing and supporting work-based training that can facilitate the transition to full time employment; 2) Educating employers in regional high-demand sectors about the benefits of hiring PWD; and 3) Strengthening partnerships and communication between education, high-demand employers and workforce service providers in order to create a more direct path to employment for PWD in the East Bay Region. Other project partners include community colleges, University of California Berkeley, St. Mary's University, and the other workforce development boards within the Regional Planning Unit.

In addition, many of the organizations in Contra Costa County have participated in the development of the Alameda and Contra Costa Local Partnership Agreement (ACC-LPA), where a wide set of partners from both counties came together to foster preparation for and achievement of Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) in the region.

The core ACC-LPA partners that are located in Contra Costa County include:

- Regional Center of the East Bay
- Department of Rehabilitation, Greater East Bay District
- Contra Costa County Office of Education
- Mount Diablo Unified School District
- San Ramon Valley Unified School District
- West Contra Costa Unified School District

This group will continue to meet quarterly to expand and solidify their efforts, bringing in new partners (including the WDBCCC), and creating county-specific sub-groups that can focus on the specific issues and collaboration needed within each county.

To increase engagement with local partners and increase support for jobseekers with ID/DD, WDBCCC would like to enhance coordination among partners working with this population. The ACC-LPA lays out significant thinking on referral processes, information sharing, and other practices for guiding the collaborative work of partners. To improve partner coordination in Contra Costa County, WDBCCC and other partners will work to align with and build off the approaches identified in the LPA to establish consistency and cohesion in practices. WDBCCC will also work with partners to coordinate regular (quarterly or semi-annual) meetings of all local partners to improve coordination, information sharing, and partnership.

WDBCCC will work with partners to analyze the current service delivery systems to identify modifications that would make them more effective and accessible. For example, WDBCCC will work with partners to improve the referral system with steps such as increasing linkages between partners to service providers, creating a partner referral mechanism for tracking referrals, and ensuring warm handoffs in both directions. Other steps may include revising the information that is available to partners and the ID/DD population to make the language more accessible (such as fewer acronyms), and fleshing out training opportunities that can affect individuals with ID/DD, such as training direct service providers to become certified to ask if people have a disability and what supports they need.

2. Local Board Partnerships

*List the names of organizations the Local Board is partnering with to implement these plans.**

The Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County (WDBCCC) currently has

partnerships with a variety of organizations (as described in Section 1) to coordinate their efforts to serve individuals with ID/DD. In order to implement the plans described elsewhere in this document, WDBCCC will form additional partnerships with organizations in the community. In the future, the WDBCCC will build upon relationships established through its DEA initiative. Additional planned partnerships include the Office of Federal Contract Compliance and the Ernst and Young Centers for Excellence to explore the possibility of creating a pilot for employing autistic individuals in Contra Costa County. The WDBCCC will also research models such as Toolworks, a social enterprise in the County that employs more than 100 individuals with disabilities in janitorial and staffing businesses, and Project Search, a national program with local branches that prepares young people with significant disabilities for success in CIE.

WDBCCC has a number of employer partners that have expressed interest in hiring individuals with ID/DD. The WDBCCC will seek to further educate employers on how to work with individuals with ID/DD. To further the plans described in this document, WDBCCC will develop long term partnerships with employers to improve education and awareness levels for working with ID/DD populations and increase employment opportunities for individuals with ID/DD.

3. Level of Participation

*If participating in CIE LPA as explained above, please describe the level of participation.**

The initial CIE LPA meeting in Contra Costa County will be held on January 29, 2019. While the regional CIE LPA was originally structured to include both Alameda and Contra Costa counties, the core partners determined that it would be valuable to meet at the county level in order to make the meetings more productive. The WDBCCC will attend this meeting as an invited community partner, will participate in the development of strategic goals for 2019, and plans to become a regular participant in subsequent quarterly meetings.

D. Engaging with Partners to Better Understand the Needs of English Language Learners, the Foreign Born, and Refugees

1. Local Board Engagement with Stakeholders

*In areas where County Employment Service Plans do not exist, Local Boards are required to engage with stakeholders, including community based organizations, to better understand the data, demographics, employment trends and other relevant information specific to the LEP, foreign born and refugee populations. This information should inform the development of strategies to serve this target population. Specifically, Local Boards should engage stakeholders to accomplish the following:**

- *Understand the demographics, barriers to employment and any other relevant information about the target population.**
- *Develop an assessment of gaps in services that English Learners, foreign born and refugees experience in the workforce system.**
- *Identify strategies for outreach and recruitment to these target populations.**
- *Identify strategies detailing how Local Boards will work with partners to better serve the LEP, foreign born and refugee population.**

1. Target Population

*Understand the demographics, barriers to employment and any other relevant information about the target population.**

A total of 6.7% of the households in Contra Costa County are limited English speaking households, with higher concentrations of limited English speakers in some areas. In the county, 24.7% of the population is foreign-born.^{11, 12}

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S1602.

Contra Costa County is designated by the California Department of Social Services as one of ten refugee-impacted counties in the state, with a large population of refugees residing there.¹³ These resettled refugees have varying levels of education; some are highly educated but may not understand the American job market or what employment opportunities are open to them while others have low education levels and require intensive assistance.¹⁴ In 2013-2017, 43% of refugees were from the Middle East/Iraq, 27% were from Iran, 10% were from Africa, 4% were from Afghanistan, and 4% were from Southeast Asia.¹⁵

Barriers for the refugee population include: lack of documentation; limited education, lack of computer literacy, and limited English proficiency; limited access to childcare and transportation; homelessness; for undocumented individuals, a mistrust and fear of seeking help; lack of self-confidence; the double barrier of lacking general literacy skills and lacking English language skills; cultural stigma about applying for benefits; and cultural limitations for women from countries where education and employment are not encouraged for females. Refugees with higher levels of education and professional experience in their country may not be aware of the resources available to help them obtain employment related to their previous training. Additionally, refugee women who traditionally would have stayed home to raise children are increasingly seeking employment due to the high cost of living in the United States.

The political climate has also decreased the feeling of safety in these communities, causing even documented individuals to experience the fear of separation from their families. This can make it less likely for individuals to pursue services and workforce training that they are eligible for.

Furthermore, addressing the needs of refugees requires an understanding the different circumstances of various refugee groups. For instance, according to WDBCCC partners, Afghan refugee families are often Special Immigrant Visa holders and can work as soon as they arrive. The men are often well educated and have fewer barriers, while the women tend to experience more employment barriers and may be illiterate in their own language. Serving such a family requires a customized approach for each individual in order to meet their particular needs.

2. Gaps in Services

*Develop an assessment of gaps in services that English Learners, foreign born and refugees experience in the workforce system. **

Gaps in services for English Learners (ELs), foreign born, and refugees include the following: a need for greater availability of resources in all the languages that individuals need, additional support for people who are contradicting cultural norms, training in cultural competence (e.g., eye contact in a job interview or working in teams once employed), job coaching, and educational training programs targeted specifically to this population. Several key gaps in services include access to supportive services for child care, transportation, resources that are available on evenings and weekends, and mental health services and support. Public input meeting participants also cited knowledge-based gaps that affect this population's ability to

¹² U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP02.

¹³ Refugee Impacted Counties. California Department of Social Services. Accessed on December 11, 2018. <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Refugees/CRCs/Refugee-Impacted-Counties>

¹⁴ Refugee Services Plan. Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department. Plan Years 2016-2019.

¹⁵ Refugee Arrivals Into California by Country/Region of Origin. Federal Fiscal Years 2013-2017. California Department of Social Services.

participate in the workforce system, including computer and technology skills and knowledge (along with low access to computers), education, knowledge on legal rights in the workplace (i.e., on issues such as hours and safety), language barriers, and vocational training.

For service providers, meeting participants also named the following gaps: a lack of smooth handoffs between agencies and services, insufficient interagency communication, low cultural competence of staff delivering services, and a lack of agency capacity. There is also a lack of connections to other organizations, including faith-based organizations and organizations that help more highly-educated professionals. Participants also cited a need for more contextualized ESL classes to help students bridge from language instruction to skills needed for employment (e.g., working in groups, critical thinking, etc.).

3. Strategies for Outreach and Recruitment

*Identify strategies for outreach and recruitment to these target populations.**

Public input meeting participants suggested a number of strategies that the WDBCCC plans to implement to improve outreach and recruitment to target populations. For reaching the Hispanic community, strategies included advertising services through the Spanish media, including bilingual radio stations, television, and Spanish Facebook ads. More broadly, meeting participants recommended identifying community-based, faith-based, and cultural organizations that serve specific populations and have a strong position in specific communities and/or are run by individuals from those communities. WDBCCC will work with those organizations to share information and resources in a targeted way to specific groups. Similarly, WDBCCC will make information about workforce services more broadly available by providing information and resources at other community access points, including schools (preschools, K-12, adult schools, and community colleges), libraries, SparkPoint centers, the Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) office, Latina Center, Lifelong Medical Care, and local businesses. Finally, WDBCCC should consider working with members of this population who have received employment support to provide information to others in their community.

Meeting participants also suggested strategies for partnering with organizations that serve specific populations. For example, WDBCCC should partner with Adult Schools, which have a strong history of serving this population and could provide transition specialists that can support individuals in transitioning to community college. In addition, WDBCCC should build partnerships with key organizations that work with refugees in the area, such as Catholic Charities of the Bay Area (the primary supporter of refugees in the Bay Area), International Refugee Council, Monument Impact, and Lao Family Services.

In addition, meeting participants recommended that WDBCCC strengthen referral relationships to improve client outcomes. This would include identifying community-based organizations for referrals for wrap-around support for clients receiving workforce services; establishing a cross-referral relationship with CoCo Kids for identification of parents who need workforce services; and establishing referral relationships with organizations that provide support in applying for an Individual Tax Identification Number for those who do not have a social security number.

The WDBCCC will also seek to expand opportunities for communication with partners that directly serve this population, in order to learn more about their resources and how the WDBCCC can leverage and support their activities.

Finally, meeting participants recommended WDBCCC help organizations improve their capacity to work with this population by increasing the number of their staff and leadership that reflect the communities of the populations they serve and by building the cultural competence of all staff.

4. Strategies for Working with Partners

*Identify strategies detailing how Local Boards will work with partners to better serve the LEP, foreign born and refugee population.**

The Workforce Development Board of Contra Costa County (WDBCCC) identified a number of strategies for working with partners to better serve the LEP, foreign born, and refugee populations.

First, the WDBCCC will work to increase collaboration among partners by using Workforce Integration Network (WIN) meetings to convene providers to discuss how to best support this population and working with partners to help them figure out how they can support their client's employment and training needs.

The WDBCCC will also work to improve the referral process with partners and coordination of services through the WINs. They will ensure warm handoffs between organizations and follow up on referrals to confirm clients are receiving the services they need. The WDBCCC will also increase coordination with partners to provide more integrated services for clients. They will work with partners to hire community navigators to serve the populations and individuals most in need, to help them navigate the services they require.

In addition, the WDBCCC will work with partners to increase communication and outreach to the community. First, they will work with partners to support the development of a centralized information hub that outlines all relevant resources available to this population to ensure WDBCCC, partners, and community members are aware of all community resources available. They will also work with partners to streamline messaging to the immigrant community about services and programs to make it clear that available resources are integrate and connected. The Contra Costa Workforce Collaborative will also play an important role as a referral network for this population.

The WDBCCC will work to expand relevant educational opportunities for this population, such as concurrent vocational and language training, and partnering with community colleges to enable individuals to participate in non-credit community college courses (which they can enroll in regardless of citizenship status).

The WDBCCC will work to expand connections to employers and opportunities for employment. They will expand employer partnerships to encourage direct employment where possible. They will also partner with a foreign degree evaluation service (i.e., Upwardly Global) to help individuals find employment opportunities to apply training and education from their home country. Finally, WDBCCC will work with partners to host job fairs with job opportunities targeted for this population.