



CDSS

WILL LIGHTBOURNE
DIRECTOR

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street • Sacramento, CA 95814 • www.cdss.ca.gov



EDMUND G. BROWN JR.
GOVERNOR

May 27, 2014

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

FROM: TODD R. BLAND
Deputy Director
Welfare-to-Work Division

SUBJECT: ONLINE CALIFORNIA WORK OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY
TO KIDS (CalWORKs) APPRAISAL TOOL (OCAT)

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

The purpose of this letter is to announce the development of the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT). This web-based appraisal tool is to be used by all County Welfare Departments (CWDs) statewide during the CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work (WTW) early engagement process to appraise clients for needs, barriers, strengths, and capacity to work. It is intended to take the place of current CWD appraisal tools that are being used for this step in the WTW process. The projected statewide roll out of OCAT is scheduled for Fall 2014.

OCAT Background and Purpose

In March 2014, CDSS contracted with ICF International (ICF) to develop the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT). OCAT will be based on the publicly available Online Work Readiness Assessment (OWRA) tool developed by ICF for the U.S. Health and Human Services Administration of Children & Families, Office of Family Assistance.

OCAT will equip caseworkers with an in-depth appraisal of client strengths and barriers to employment by collecting information related to a variety of topics. This in-depth appraisal fulfills the statutory requirements of Assembly Bill 74 (Chapter 21, Statutes of 2013) and is intended to result in the effective and early assignment of CalWORKs clients to appropriate activities and supportive services with the goal of leading them to better outcomes.

OCAT Customization and Configuration

Recently, CDSS has engaged its stakeholder partners, including County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), CWDs, welfare advocacy groups, community college representatives, and legislative staff, in extensive review of the OWRA tool to gather recommendations for the OCAT customization and configuration. The CDSS looks forward to continuing this collaborative effort throughout the remainder of the customization process.

The OCAT Change Control Board (CCB), comprised of CDSS, CWDA, and ICF representatives, is the primary decision making group for the OCAT customization and configuration. It is charged with reviewing all customization and configuration recommendations received from our stakeholder partners and determining which will be included in the OCAT. To date, over 600 OCAT recommendations have been received from our stakeholder partners.

The enclosed document (*OCAT Development Overview, Background, and Change Control Board Process*) provides additional information regarding the OCAT project including but not limited to project background, stakeholder input, organization of recommendations, the CCB decision making process, project milestones, etc.

The CDSS would like to note that the current OCAT development schedule has two 'fatal flaw' periods built in; one prior to tool development and another prior to statewide release. During these 'fatal flaw' periods, our stakeholders will be provided with a CCB Report which will include decisions on all submitted recommendations and preliminary mock-ups of the OCAT tool based on approved recommendations.

OCAT Hosting and Consortium Interfacing

Once the OCAT is made available statewide, the CDSS plans for ICF to host this tool in the short-term, while local statewide hosting options are explored. The CDSS is currently in the process of reviewing a variety of hosting options with its consortium partners. The ultimate goal is to eliminate any redundancy between OCAT and the consortia systems. Whether this ultimately means that OCAT is integrated into or interfaces with the SAWS systems is still to be determined.

The CDSS appreciates all of the time and valuable input which its stakeholder partners have contributed to this process and looks forward to continued open collaboration with you and your staff to ensure the success of this project as well as the continued success of the CalWORKs program. If you have any questions or would like to further discuss the information in this letter, please contact Melissa Kenney of the CalWORKs Employment Bureau, at (916) 654-0699 or Kären Dickerson, Chief, Employment and Eligibility Branch, at (916) 651-6562.

Enclosures

ONLINE CALWORKS APPRAISAL TOOL (OCAT)

Development Overview, Background, and Change Control Board Process

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

In March 2014, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) contracted with ICF International (ICF) to configure the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT), a web-based appraisal tool to be used by all CalWORKs caseworkers who interact with welfare-to-work clients in the State of California. OCAT will be based on the publicly available Online Work Readiness Assessment (OWRA) tool developed by ICF for the U.S. Health and Human Services Administration of Children & Families, Office of Family Assistance.

OCAT will equip caseworkers with an in-depth appraisal of client strengths and barriers to employment by collecting information related to a variety of topics, including but not limited to: employment history, interests, and skills; educational history, learning disabilities, language barriers; physical and behavioral health, including, mental health and substance abuse issues; child health and well-being; domestic violence and safety; need for supportive services, etc. This in-depth appraisal fulfills the statutory requirements of Assembly Bill 74 (Chapter 21, Statutes of 2013) and is intended to result in the effective assignment of clients to activities thus maximizing the benefit of the flexible Welfare-to-Work 24-Month Time Clock.

Beginning in mid-March 2014, ICF in collaboration with CDSS solicited feedback from a range of stakeholders regarding recommended changes to the OWRA tool in order to customize it for use in the CalWORKs program, including the CalWORKs business process flow and program rules needed to inform the development of OCAT. CDSS solicited five counties to serve as “Early Users” of the un-customized version of the OWRA tool as a means to gather initial reactions and ideas for customization. Feedback from this group is currently being collected through surveys and bi-weekly conference calls with ICF and CDSS. Additionally, five counties will serve as Pilot Test sites of the initial customized version of OCAT, beginning mid-summer 2014. The following table identifies the counties who are participating in this project as Early Users and Pilot Testers:

EARLY USER COUNTIES	PILOT TEST COUNTIES
<i>Fresno County</i>	<i>Lassen County</i>
<i>Los Angeles County</i>	<i>Los Angeles County</i>
<i>San Bernardino County</i>	<i>Sacramento County</i>
<i>Sonoma County</i>	<i>San Bernardino County</i>
<i>Tulare County</i>	<i>San Francisco</i>

Stakeholder meetings were held between ICF, CDSS, Early User Counties, Pilot Test Counties, CWDA representatives, welfare rights advocacy groups, legislative staff, subject matter experts, and various other stakeholder partners in order to collect recommendations for OCAT. The largest of these meetings, the OCAT Stakeholder Workgroup Meeting, occurred on April 16-17, 2014. During this workgroup meeting input was solicited on tool content, the phrasing of questions, etc.

CHANGE CONTROL BOARD PROCESS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

A Change Control Board (CCB) comprised of CDSS, the County Welfare Director’s Association (CWDA), and ICF representatives is charged with determining which specific changes, modifications, and revisions are needed for the OWRA tool to be configured as OCAT. When possible, the CCB will attempt to reach consensus on the disposition of each change request. However, the CCB will rely on majority vote if a consensus cannot be reached, as delaying a decision may adversely affect the project’s deliverables and timeline.

Every recommendation received by ICF throughout the Early User and stakeholder workgroup process was captured and recorded for consideration by the CCB. ICF recorded approximately 600 recommendations to

ONLINE CALWORKS APPRAISAL TOOL (OCAT)

Development Overview, Background, and Change Control Board Process

improve or change the OWRA tool as it becomes configured into OCAT. These recommendations ranged from minor edits to the language, to adding/deleting questions, to more substantial changes such as modifications to the Career Pathways Plan (CPP), to the rules that the OWRA tool uses to produce the CPP, and to recommendations on the functionality of the Tool. The CCB is charged with making one of three possible decisions for each recommendation:

APPROVE	The CCB has determined that implementing the change will enhance the tool's effectiveness. This recommendation will be implemented within the existing project schedule and budget and completed in time for pilot testing.
DEFER	The CCB has determined that: <ol style="list-style-type: none">(1) Inclusion of this change would violate budget, schedule, or contract constraints. These changes will not be included in the initial release of OCAT. They will remain a priority for any future releases of OCAT, and will be revisited by the CCB prior to release of OCAT statewide.(2) Further research, discussion or input will be needed before the CCB can make a definitive decision on the recommendation. These recommendations will not be included in the pilot version of OCAT but will be revisited by the CCB prior to release of OCAT statewide.
REJECT	The CCB has determined that: <ol style="list-style-type: none">(1) This change is beyond the scope of this projects contract or does not enhance the tools effectiveness; the CCB will not attempt to modify the contract to include these changes.(2) The changes would negatively impact the integrity or effectiveness of the tool, contradicts current policies, research, or best practices, increases the length of time for an appraisal, or would negatively impact case workers, clients or the ability of counties or CDSS to effectively implement and manage OCAT.

CDSS will provide its stakeholder partners opportunities to offer input regarding CCB decisions during two 'fatal flaw' periods. Fatal flaw reviews will occur at two points: (1) prior to the initial development of OCAT for use in Pilot Test counties, and, (2) prior to final OCAT customization. Please see the chart below in the *Project Development Milestones* section for further information regarding CCB decision making and 'fatal flaw' timeframes.

DEVELOPMENT, PILOT, AND REGIONAL TRAINING

ICF will begin OCAT development based on CCB decisions in late May 2014. In June and July, ICF will complete development of OCAT and begin testing OCAT in preparation of Pilot. Pilot testing of OCAT will occur throughout August. ICF will provide Pilot Test counties with OCAT training prior to tool pilot. After pilot testing, ICF will submit a summary of pilot test recommendations to the CCB for review and decision. Once the CCB has decided on each recommendation and provided its stakeholders a 'fatal flaw' period to review decisions, ICF will proceed with completing OCAT customization and configuration. OCAT statewide training will follow, which will feature ten regional 'Train-the-Trainer' Training Sessions. OCAT is currently scheduled to be released for statewide use by late September/October, 2014.

ONLINE CALWORKS APPRAISAL TOOL (OCAT)

Development Overview, Background, and Change Control Board Process

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES

The following chart features OCAT development milestones including projected timeframes for stakeholder input, CCB reviews, 'fatal flaw' review, OCAT pilot testing, OCAT training, and OCAT final release. This schedule is subject change, depending on contractual parameters with ICF.

TIMEFRAMES (2014)	OCAT PROJECT DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES
MARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICF collects initial information on CalWORKs rules and county business practices Early User counties begin using OWRA (<i>ICF will collect OCAT customization and configuration recommendations from Early Users through June, 2014</i>).
APRIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICF collects information from stakeholders and CDSS regarding desired OCAT configuration/customization, CalWORKs rules, county business practices, and user capacity (<i>via stakeholder workgroup meetings, written submission, and survey</i>). ICF submits a summary of requested changes to CCB for review and decision.
MAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CCB makes initial determination of which changes will be included in the pilot release of OCAT. CCB responses to all requested changes shared with stakeholders along with DRAFT OCAT tool. CCB consults with stakeholder partners for a 'fatal flaw' review of accepted changes. Based on CCB final decisions, ICF begins OCAT development.
JUNE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICF completes development of OCAT and begins testing OCAT in preparation of Pilot.
JULY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCAT Pilot training occurs at the five county pilot test sites. OCAT Pilot Testing begins (<i>end of July</i>).
AUGUST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCAT Pilot Testing ends (<i>end of August</i>). ICF submits a summary of requested changes to CCB for review and decision.
SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CCB makes final determination of which changes will be included in the final release of OCAT. CCB consults with stakeholder partners for a 'fatal flaw' review of accepted changes. Based on CCB final decisions, ICF finalizes OCAT customization/configuration. OCAT Statewide 'Train-the-Trainer' Sessions occur at ten regional sites statewide. OCAT is released and available to all counties.
NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDSS continues discussions regarding OCAT hosting options and consortia integration (<i>this activity will continue into 2015</i>).