Testing Behavioral Interventions to Increase Participant Engagement

Ella Gifford-Hawkins | Friday, November 4, 2016
Larimer County, Colorado

• Larimer County is in Northern Colorado about 1 hour north of Denver on the 1-25 corridor. (Part of the Front Range)

• The Larimer County Works Program serves individuals receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

• Average caseload is about 600 families per month

• Larimer County accessed Mathematica technical assistance as part of an employment-focused application to the Colorado Department of Human Services
A Motivation for Change

- Monthly Contact Sheet (MCS) required reporting mechanism of TANF activities for all Works Program participants
- About half of participants submit MCS on time
  - Staff spend inordinate amounts of time following up on late submissions, case conciliation
  - Families at increased risk of sanction, case closure = increase in instability
- Opportunity to change how we communicate the MCS to participants
  - Make it easier for participants to fulfill this program requirement
  - Create more stability for the family
A Motivation for Change

- Reduce administrative churn and increase staff efficiencies
- Improves engagement and working relationship between coach and participant
- Increase consistency of service among staff

- Improves engagement and working relationship between coach and participant
# Diagnosing the bottlenecks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral Bottleneck</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Misunderstanding</strong></td>
<td>Introduce an easy-to-read brochure during the first meeting with a coach that clearly explains the MCS, how to track hours, and tips for completing it</td>
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<td>Participants either do not understand the purpose of the MCS or the consequences of failing to complete it</td>
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<td><strong>Procrastination</strong></td>
<td>Send participants a “planning prompt” email that encourages proactive tracking and saving of the necessary supporting documents¹</td>
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<td>Participants delay taking action or underestimate the effort required to complete the MCS in a timely manner</td>
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<td><strong>Memory/Forgetting</strong></td>
<td>Provide a large, customized reminder post-it note to the participant</td>
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<td>Participants intend to complete the MCS, but forget to do so</td>
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<td>Send participants a reminder postcard shortly before the submission deadline</td>
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¹ We also introduced an incentive prize lottery for on-time submitters of the MCS in one of the treatment groups.
Larimer County Workforce Center
get connected | stay connected

Important Links and Contact Information

At the Larimer County Workforce Center, we want to help you on your path to success:

1. You can view an instructional video on how to complete the Monthly Contact Sheet at: www.larimerworkforce.org/MCS
2. If you have any questions about the Monthly Contact Sheet or anything else, don't hesitate to contact your coach (see cover).
3. You can find lists of helpful information on our website: www.larimerworkforce.org/MCS
4. You can visit us in-person:
   - FORT COLLINS
     200 West Oak Street, Ft. Collins, CO 80522
     Tel. (970) 498-6000
     Open 8am to 5pm Mon - Fri
   - LOVELAND
     418 East 4th Street, Loveland
     Tel. (970) 619-646
     Open 8am to 5pm Mon - Fri
     Walk-in hours: 9am to 1pm and 1 to 4pm on Fri

Tracking Your Path to Success

Getting Started with Your Monthly Contact Sheet (MCS)

Why is the MCS important?

Congratulations on getting started with Larimer County Works! The Monthly Contact Sheet (MCS) will help you keep track of your work toward your goals. The MCS also helps you see the progress you are making:

- The MCS includes spaces for you to record the number of hours you spend each day working on the activities listed on your Roadmap Contract.
- Supporting documents help to show the work you've accomplished (such as job search logs or pay stubs).
- You need to submit your completed MCS and documentation to your Career Coach every month, and no later than the 5th day of the following month.
- The MCS is required every month in order to continue receiving your benefits, so always complete the form and turn it in on time.

Protect your benefits! If you do not turn in your MCS and supporting documents, your TANF cash assistance, child care benefits, and other assistance may be reduced or stopped.

What do I track?

Many activities can assist you in achieving your goals. Your Roadmap Contract specifies the activities you must track and report in your MCS. Look at your Roadmap and check off the activities listed:
- Meeting with your coach
- Employment
- Internship
- Education/Training
- Work Study
- Job Search/Job Readiness
- Adult Basic Education
- English as a Second Language
- High School Diploma
- General Equivalency Diploma (GED)

Be sure to track these activities any time you do them each month.

Tips for success

✓ Record your activities every day. Scheduling a little bit of time each day will help you stay on top of tracking your hours. Set aside 5 minutes every day to write down the hours you spent on work activities in your MCS. Where will you spend 5 minutes each day recording your activities?

✓ Stay organized. Keep track of your documents in one place (for example, the folder provided by your coach) to make it easy to turn them in with your MCS at the end of the month. Where will you keep track of your documents?

✓ Set weekly reminders. Set a reminder for yourself each week to check that your hours are written down and that your documents are organized. TIP: You can use the reminder sticky note provided with this packet.

How will you remind yourself each week to check that your MCS is up to date?

✓ Contact your coach. If you are having any trouble completing your activities, call your career coach right away. Your coach is here to help you figure out a way to move forward.
Reminder Post-it Note

Your Roadmap Contract specifies the activities you must track and report in your MCS. Look at your Roadmap and check off the activities listed:

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When will you spend 5 minutes each day recording your activities? ____________________________

Where will you keep track of your documents? ____________________________________________

How will remind yourself each week to check that your MCS is up to date? __________________

If you are having any trouble completing your activities, call or email your Career Coach below. You can also email your MCS and required documents to us at LRworks@larimer.org.
Planning Prompt Email

Protect your benefits. Start tracking your MCS hours now!

Hi,

Congratulations on getting started with your Larimer County Works Roadmap. We want to make sure that you have the information you need to set and achieve your goals. As we discussed at our initial meeting, the Monthly Contact Sheet (MCS) will help you track your hours and measure your own progress. The MCS can be found on our website with instructions and a “how-to” video:

www.larimerworkforce.org/MCS

Take 5 minutes now to watch this video.

It pays to be on time!

Every month that you turn in your MCS and supporting documents on time, you will be entered into a drawing to win different prizes. These may
REMINDER: Your MCS is due soon. Act now!

Your MCS and supporting documents are due by the 5th of the month.

✓ Is your form up-to-date?
✓ Do you have the necessary supporting documents?

An electronic copy of the form and instructions are available online at: www.larimerworkforce.org/MCS

If you have any questions, please contact us at (970) 498-6600

Remember to reach out to your Career Coach if you have any questions or concerns.

DID YOU KNOW? You can use your smartphone to submit your MCS. You can take pictures of your MCS and supporting documents and email them to us at LRworks@larimer.org
Rapid Cycle Evaluation

- Test different combinations of strategies to see what works best and for whom

- *Does this behavioral intervention increase timely MCS submissions?*

- *Does this behavioral intervention reduce case conciliations, sanctions, and closures?*
  - Basic intervention: Reminder postcard
  - Enhanced intervention: Brochure + planning email + reminder postcard
  - Enhanced intervention + incentive: Timely submitters eligible for monthly prize lottery

- Use county and state administrative data for analysis
Rapid Cycle Evaluation

Simple trial with *existing* Works participants:

- 401 existing participants randomly assigned to Treatment or Control

- **Control**
  - 202 participants
  - “Business as usual”
  - No reminder of due date

- **Treatment**
  - 202 participants
  - Receive postcard via US mail 10 days prior to MCS due date

- 3 consecutive months (July – September 2016)
Rapid Cycle Evaluation

Multifaceted trial with *newly enrolling* Works participants:

- **Rolling random assignment of new Works participants**
  - 265 participants since June 1, 2016

- **Control**
  - 83 participants
  - “Business as usual”
  - *No reminders*

- **Enhanced Treatment**
  - 90 participants
  - Brochure
  - Planning Email
  - Postcard Reminder

- **Enhanced Treatment + Lottery**
  - 92 participants
  - Brochure
  - Planning Email
  - Postcard Reminder
  - Prize lottery for timely submitters
    - (4 $50 gift cards)
Learning as we go

- Results from simple trial will be finalized soon; results from multifaceted trial expected in early 2017
- Building our capacity for doing rigorous research
- Evolution in how we think about developing and implementing programs and services. Matching research/quantitative data and a strategic planning process.
- Participating in research has expanded our network with other innovation-oriented practitioners.
- Working with Mathematica staff who understand TANF yet can help us step back, question assumptions and ask good questions.
Learning as we go

• Implementing change differently. Testing it, modifying it, and scaling up.

• Staff and participant response to the prize lottery

• Opportunities for additional evaluation cycles:
  o Testing the use of our new online platform (*Your Virtual Path to Success*, equipped with mobile accessibility) for recording and submitting MCS data
  o Text message or mobile alert reminders
  o Considering other incentive options
For more information…

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