

**COMMUNITY WELFARE REFORM PLANNING:
EARLY INDICATIONS FROM
SIX CALIFORNIA COUNTIES**

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The California Communities Program (CCP) Working Papers Series features reports on research in progress by University of California faculty. The papers deal with the themes of community governance, citizenship capacity building and local economic development, and are specific to California concerns. The purpose of the series is to stimulate dialogue about new research ideas, especially among audiences that would be unlikely to access the information through traditional academic channels. The series is not peer-reviewed and is intended to support subsequent publication in journals rather than precluding it. All views and ideas presented are the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the CCP or the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Faculty interested in submitting manuscripts to the Working Papers series should contact the CCP Director, Dave Campbell, at 916/754-4328; dave.c.campbell@ucdavis.edu.

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The California Communities Program (CCP) provides direction and focus for the University of California's Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources research and outreach in the area of community development. The aim of this work is to strengthen the leadership capabilities of local citizens, fortify community self-governance, and enhance local and regional economies. The CCP is a unit of the Department of Human and Community Development at UC Davis, although with statewide functions and responsibilities. The CCP Director reports to an appointed advisory committee made up of specialists and faculty from the Davis, Berkeley and Riverside campuses, and representatives of county and regional Cooperative Extension offices.

Preface

This report is the first in a planned series that will examine the community processes set in motion by welfare reform. It compares early planning activities in six California counties—Butte, Kern, Sacramento, San Diego, Tulare and Ventura. The findings will be of interest to a variety of stakeholders, including members of Boards of Supervisors, welfare directors and other personnel in county agencies, representatives of non-profit organizations, interested citizens, and the state officials and organizations with whom these local leaders must interact.

The report addresses the following questions:

- What welfare reform planning activities have counties undertaken?•
- What threats and opportunities do county leaders perceive?
- What is the effect of welfare reform on collaborative community networks?
- What can we learn about healthy communities by comparing local responses?

Findings are based on interviews with county leaders, review of local documents, and considerations from relevant academic literature.

Careful attention to the community processes surrounding welfare reform will be every bit as important as tracking its impact on particular families and children. Proponents of devolution look to the voluntary sectors and local “civil society” to assume new responsibility for social services. This presumes an increase in inter-organizational collaboration, new public-private partnerships, and heightened feelings of community solidarity.

As in any ambitious departure from existing policy, pitfalls and failures are inevitable along the way. This makes it essential that communities build in opportunities to learn: holding one another accountable for achieving goals, and modifying objectives based on experience. By revisiting public ideas as they evolve, we hope this and future reports provide a useful resource that encourages and deepens community reflection.

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COMMUNITY WELFARE REFORM PLANNING: EARLY INDICATIONS FROM SIX CALIFORNIA COUNTIES

Introduction

With federal and state legislation now in place, attention turns to how welfare reform policies and programs will be implemented at the local level. County governments, the “service provider of last resort” in our federal system, will play a central role. Federal and state laws grant counties considerable discretion to shape programs attuned to local circumstances. They also impose complicated new goals and mandates. By fall 1997, 25% of the county caseload must be working or in community service employment at least 20 hours per week, and by 2002 the goal increases to 50% and 32 hours per week. Meeting these goals will result in financial savings for counties, while failure could trigger sanctions that reduce the state and local share of the federal block grant.

At issue is the capacity of counties to plan and rapidly implement effective reforms. Some features of the current setting bode well for counties: the state economy continues to expand, unemployment rates are very low, new funding for child care and job creation is forthcoming, and the county share of the new federal block grant will be relatively large (due to dramatic declines in caseloads since mid-1994, the point used to determine the block grant level).

Other indicators are less promising: the state’s welfare caseload of 2.4 million recipients is more than twice that of the next highest state; more than 500,000 new jobs must be created (see Table 1); an average of seven people are currently looking for each new job created and the entry-level wage paid by most of the fastest growing job categories is not enough to cover a family’s basic costs for housing, child care and transportation (California Budget Project, May 1997). In addition, county governments face chronic budget strains and diminished staff capacity, the legacy of state fiscal policies that disadvantage local governments (e.g. Propositions 13 and 98, and property tax transfers to support K-12 education during the early 1990s), and of economic restructuring in resource-based industries (particularly in rural counties). Fiscal stress will be exacerbated by dramatic reductions in federal transfer payments for food stamps and SSI, which are being cut by more than \$40 billion nationally over the next five years.

Table 1. Projected Job Deficits in Sample Counties

	<i>Butte</i>	<i>Kern</i>	<i>Sacramento</i>	<i>San Diego</i>	<i>Tulare</i>	<i>Ventura</i>
Average monthly unemployed (1996)	7,400	35,500	33,000	65,600	25,500	27,000
AFDC cases minus child only and disabled	5,336	18,296	33,717	47,203	12,479	7,447
Projected annual job growth	1,598	3,799	13,628	17,888	1,986	9,852
Number of job seekers per new job	8	13	5	6	18	3

Source: California Budget Project (May 1997)

While one goal of welfare reform is to reduce the size and cost of government, the immediate impact has been to create an ambitious list of new tasks for county governments and their community partners. Within the next year or two, counties are being asked to:

- reinvent the local welfare bureaucracy around the new emphasis on employment;
- create thousands of new entry-level jobs in the local economy;
- develop community service work programs for aid recipients who cannot find work;
- create child care, transportation and other support services sufficient to serve the needs of welfare recipients entering the workforce;
- develop new record keeping systems for monitoring time limits and other provisions of federal and state law;
- significantly engage the community in developing plans and implementing programs.

As daunting as this list is, it only begins to suggest the scope of the changes underway. Counties have been asked by the state to address 17 distinct programmatic areas in their formal welfare reform plan, and one analysis of the state's CalWORKs legislation (AB 1542, California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids) identified more than 60 new programmatic initiatives for evaluators to track. Most of these initiatives require agencies to develop not only new programs but new partners, adding to the sense of uncertainty about what lies ahead.

Under the old welfare system, the primary goal was income maintenance. The chief method for holding counties accountable was by calculating their "error rate" in determining client eligibility. The new reforms will make county welfare departments accountable (explicitly or implicitly) for more complicated behavioral and cultural changes: getting absent fathers to make child support payments; keeping teenagers from becoming pregnant; making sure parents immunize their children and keep them attending school; convincing business owners to hire welfare recipients; reducing rates of substance abuse; changing the work culture of agency bureaucrats; etc.

Public support for welfare reform is currently high, but could drop as tradeoffs are forced between competing policy goals. As Smolensky (1997) has observed, welfare reform has been promoted under the banner of three widely shared goals: cutting government costs, preserving work incentives, and protecting the well-being of children. The problem in trying to achieve these goals simultaneously is that they are inherently competing. Policies and programs that support children tend to cost more and undercut work incentives. Policies that maintain work incentives and cut costs tend to place children at greater risk. Whether local communities can learn to negotiate value conflicts constructively remains to be seen.

Given complex mandates, wide discretion, competing goals, and varying fiscal and civic capacity, no two county plans will be alike, nor will any completely succeed. Welfare reform has turned counties into important "laboratories of democracy," where the stakes are not only the well-being of our children but also the vitality of our civic life; not only promoting the value of work but also the value of civic participation; not only the cost of

government but the character of civic obligations. What can be learned by paying attention to the choices counties are making, the community processes which are shaping those choices, and the outcomes which result?

To find out, my colleagues and I have begun to monitor welfare reform implementation in six California counties (Butte, Kern, Sacramento, San Diego, Tulare and Ventura). Our focus is on county planning and decision making processes, and the resulting policies and programs. We are particularly interested in the degree to which non-profit groups and other civic constituencies are active in planning and implementing new programs in collaboration with county governments.

The following report draws on the first phase of this research, conducted between February and August of 1997. It describes county planning activities during the period after passage of federal welfare reform in August, 1996, and prior to passage of the state's CalWORKs plan in August, 1997. Interviews with county leaders were conducted during April and May, 1997 (with the exception of Butte where interviews took place in July), and the information conveyed primarily reflects what was known as of that time.

The relatively small number of interviews conducted thus far makes it impossible to offer detailed assessments of each county situation, or definitive generalizations about what counties are doing. Our aim in this report is more modest. We identify the most striking similarities and differences in county planning activities, and share the perceptions of threat and opportunity voiced by county leaders. We then consider these findings in the context of questions emerging from the political debates surrounding welfare reform, as well as relevant literature in the social sciences. We conclude by identifying a few critical planning elements to track, and emphasizing the importance of building in opportunities for participants to learn from the inevitable failures along the way.

Sample and Methods

The six sample counties represent diverse regions of the state, and unique economic circumstances and social characteristics (see Table 2). Two, Sacramento and San Diego, are predominately urban in nature, though each also contains a number of areas with rural characteristics. A third, Ventura, is primarily suburban in nature but has a significant agricultural sector near the coast. All three of these counties are currently characterized by rapid economic growth and unemployment rates of less than 6%, though Sacramento has a relatively high poverty rate also. By contrast, Butte, Kern, and Tulare counties are characterized by low economic growth and high levels of unemployment and poverty. In general these three are considered rural counties, though each has urban centers.

Table 2. Demographic Profiles of Sample Counties

	<i>Butte</i>	<i>Kern</i>	<i>Sacramento</i>	<i>San Diego</i>	<i>Tulare</i>	<i>Ventura</i>
Population (Jan. 1996: EDD)	196,300	620,400	1,124,900	2,682,100	351,700	713,800
Median income (1990 Census)	\$22,776	\$28,634	\$39,720	\$35,022	\$24,450	\$50,091
Unemployment rate (April 1997: EDD)	9.3%	11.6%	5.3%	4.3%	14.4%	5.5%
Poverty rate (1990 Census)	12.2%	13.7%	12.5%	8.1%	18.0%	7.3%

Sources: State of California, Economic Development Department; State of California, Department of Finance, *Population Estimates for Cities and Counties*; 1990 Census of Population.

Welfare caseloads are significantly lower (as a percentage of the total population) in Ventura and San Diego, and particularly high in Tulare (see Table 3). Prior to welfare reform, each county has been spending approximately one-third of its budget on AFDC and General Assistance, with the exception of Ventura where lower caseloads have led to substantially lower expenditures. All the counties have experienced significant declines in welfare caseloads during the past year, ranging from a 14% decline in San Diego to a 6% drop in Sacramento.

Though not randomly selected, the sample makes possible comparisons of the differential impact of welfare reform on counties of different sizes, economic circumstances and distinctive urban/rural patterns. The data gathered speak to concerns that are similar to most counties in the state. They may be less applicable to the unique circumstances of Los Angeles or the more isolated rural counties.

Table 3. County Welfare Caseloads and Budgets

	<i>Butte</i>	<i>Kern</i>	<i>Sacramento</i>	<i>San Diego</i>	<i>Tulare</i>	<i>Ventura</i>
# of AFDC recipients and % of population (July 1996)	22,506 11.5%	72,587 11.7%	145,123 12.9%	182,432 6.8%	52,775 15.0%	27,648 3.9%
# of Food Stamps recipients and % of population (July 1996)	28,5161 4.3%	84,546 13.6%	166,546 14.8%	197,530 7.4%	67,910 19.3%	39,839 5.6%
# of General Assistance recipients (July 1996)	1,011	932	7,800	1,816	524	172
Total county budget (\$1,000s)(FY 1993-94)	\$166,270	\$542,781	\$1,096,120	\$1,963,842	\$328,91	\$474,226
% of budget to AFDC and General Assistance	36%	31%	37%	35%	35%	16%
AFDC Caseload Reduction (FY 1996-97)	Not available	9%	6%	14%	12%	12%

Sources: State of California, Department of Finance, Population Estimates for Cities and Counties; State of California, Department of Social Services, Public Welfare in California.

This report is based primarily on open-ended, in-person interviews conducted with key county government officials and non-profit leaders in each county (the Interview Guide can be found in Appendix A). In addition, we have reviewed public documents, county data reports, agency memoranda, and newspaper accounts. To aid the data collection effort, the investigators have teamed in each county with a local University of California Cooperative Extension Advisor familiar with local officials and non-profit social service agencies in the community. These advisors recommended leaders to interview, collected local data, made local arrangements, and helped gauge the “pulse” of the community.

Among the 5-8 leaders interviewed in each county was the county welfare reform coordinator, typically a program manager within the local welfare department assigned to oversee the planning process. Others interviewed included county Supervisors; representatives of county health, education and housing departments; administrators of the GAIN program, the Private Industry Council or other job training and economic development programs; child development or children's network leaders; private business leaders; and a variety of non-profit directors, including community action agencies, health care clinics, and local food banks or gleaning programs.

Comparison of County Planning Activities

Brief summaries of the planning activities in each of the six sample counties can be found in Appendix B. The following questions and comments address key points of comparison across the counties.

How proactive have counties been in planning for welfare reform?

With the exception of Butte, each county established one or more welfare reform planning bodies in fall 1996, and published a welfare reform planning document of some kind by early 1997. The quality of the planning activities and documents varies significantly. The urban counties have been both more proactive (starting earlier, anticipating state plans, developing pilot projects, etc.) and more inclusive in soliciting input from a wide range of community members. The quality of their planning documents is much higher, and the level of participation of non-profits, business, neighborhoods and other community members in welfare reform planning is greater. Key variables in explaining these variations appear to be the level of initiative of county officials in seeking input, and the prior existence of non-profit associations, community collaboratives or other local institutions to serve as advocates and avenues for community involvement. In general, we have found the civic infrastructure to be much stronger in more urban counties. The only corresponding advantage in rural areas is the relatively easier ability to get a majority of the key players together at one time to plan. Even this advantage dissipates if there are not staff to carry forward the work of planning groups between meetings, keep minutes, etc.

While many rural leaders were apologetic about being "behind" in the planning process, others expressed the view that such planning would simply waste precious time, especially with the state plan yet to be decided. Some went further, indicating that the real nature of welfare reform will await the outcome of lawsuits filed by client advocacy groups. Based on past experience, these individuals argue for the wisdom of moving slowly until the legal debates settle out.

What key issues are emerging in planning discussions?

In all counties, child care, transportation and job creation have been the most frequently discussed issues. The new child care slots needed statewide as adult welfare recipients move into work has been roughly estimated at between 100,000 and 200,000. Particularly acute is the need for more infant, extended hours, and weekend care. Given that many welfare recipients lack reliable personal transportation, discussion has focused on a range of options, from providing money for car repairs, creating car pools, developing a system for loaning cars to job seekers, to altering public transit routes to better link poor neighborhoods with job sites. Local economic conditions vary widely among the counties, and will likely play a decisive role in the success of welfare-to-work efforts. In general, planning for job creation lags well behind planning for service-delivery.

The challenge of linking jobs, child care and transportation is especially difficult in the more rural counties, as well as the isolated areas within the more urban counties. The long distances required to find work present a significant obstacle. While many county leaders understand the problem, we encountered little evidence of planning solutions geared to the particular needs of the rural poor.

In what institutions is planning centered and what is the relationship to preexisting planning efforts?

All of the county welfare departments are conducting some type of in-house planning, ranging from formal processes with many subcommittees in the larger counties, to less formal and detailed efforts in the smaller counties. Some welfare departments are either opening their internal planning committees to external stakeholders, or setting up parallel planning efforts that are geared to obtain public input and participation. Others have proceeded in relative isolation from community input. Every county reported that welfare department staff have been responding to numerous requests to speak to community groups—again, more extensively in some than others.

Most counties are currently reorganizing their human services departments, or have recently completed reorganization, to reflect the transformation of welfare from an entitlement system to one focused on moving individuals into jobs. The idea of “work first” and “integrated service delivery” took hold prior to passage of federal welfare reform, and county policy makers have started implementing them in a variety of small interagency efforts, often at the neighborhood level. Existing neighborhood and school-based collaboratives, such as Healthy Start programs and the “community collaboratives” initiated in a few counties under Assembly Bill 1741, have been important partners in these efforts. Many have co-sponsored community forums and other educational activities related to welfare reform.

Since the early 1990s, California counties have been required to establish an official advisory body on children’s issues in order to be eligible to receive certain state funds. These networks have broad and inclusive memberships and are well-established in most of our sample counties. They began mobilizing as early as last fall to plan for welfare reform’s impact on child care and other issues. This institutional base helps explain why planning for child care tends to be further advanced than for other aspects of welfare reform.

In a few counties, planning activities have been conducted by umbrella organizations that coordinate the activities of social service organizations in the voluntary sector. The scope and effectiveness of these organizations is much greater in the larger counties. With one or two significant exceptions, planning under the auspices of business groups or the faith community has been less organized and influential.

How effective has the planning process been in mobilizing community leadership?

In every county we encountered talented and energetic leaders who demonstrated both knowledge of the issues and commitment to the community. This is true both within county government and among the non-profit community and private leaders. We observed two distinctive styles of leadership. The first we might call “community entrepreneurs.” Characteristically, these entrepreneurs start by assessing what the problems are and what needs doing to solve them, irrespective of existing programs, agencies, turf, etc. Their enthusiasm, energy, and imagination in “working the system” is critical to moving the community in new directions. Other leaders we might term “program parochialists.” These tend to be wedded more closely to existing organizational routines, and excel in knowing what resources are available and how to move incrementally toward solutions. Many of the most positive examples of early planning and implementation are the result of creative teamwork between leaders who represent these complementary strengths.

Many agencies and community groups have engaged in formal strategic planning processes to identify needs and recommend actions. This process has the advantage of bringing a diverse group of participants to the table, encouraging holistic approaches, and heightening a sense of mutual accountability. It can also be time consuming, and suffers from a tendency to try to be all things to all people. On the other hand, much of the most productive early planning has taken place among smaller teams of leaders working independently of formal planning processes. Member of these teams generally have known one another for some time, have high levels of trust, and experience in joint problem-solving. This approach tends to produce quicker results, but may not relate well to other activities or meet the test of accountability. In still other cases, planning has followed the

dictates of power politics, such that personal access (or lack of access) to influential decision makers is the critical variable.

Stakeholder Perceptions of Opportunities and Threats

We asked county leaders to characterize the key threats and opportunities welfare reform posed for their community. As one might expect, the individual responses varied considerably in tone, complexity and ideological proclivity. Without dismissing these differences, we have chosen to present here the most frequently mentioned themes and concerns without reference to particular county settings. Taken together, these represent a form of “collective voice.” By heeding this voice, we can learn a great deal about the complex mindset of local leaders.

Without question, the most widely shared theme in our conversations was uncertainty. Since our discussions took place when the state welfare reform plan was still being debated, the uncertainty often took the form of saying: “We won’t know until we see the final state plan.” Since many of the basic parameters that will guide local planning were under debate—including time limits, child care provisions, and funding for legal immigrants and job creation—this position was entirely reasonable. But the uncertainty does not stop there. It is tied more deeply to the complexity of the sweeping changes underway, and the inability of anyone to get a firm handle on more than a small piece of those changes at any one time. “If anyone tells you they have a blueprint for how this will work, they’re a fool,” said one leader.

Our conversations often revealed a fairly mature sense of tradeoff. For example, many believed that the reforms will in fact succeed in helping many individuals move from dependency to self-sufficiency, but will simultaneously make things worse for those who “fall through the cracks,” including many children (“the canaries in a toxic environment,” as one leader put it). While agreeing that the “old system” is flawed, they also are skeptical that the new approach will solve all the problems. In general, whatever sense these local leaders have of being presented with an unfair set of burdens by higher levels of government was substantially offset by their appreciation of the opportunity “to design a new system that works better for everyone.” This was often expressed in terms of better integration of service delivery, more funding for case management, and greater attention to children’s well-being. On the other hand, many feared that federal and state plans would leave them without the resources and flexibility to do the job adequately, despite stepped-up efforts by local leaders to lobby the state legislature.

It has been said that “the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function” (Elbow, 1986, p. 234). If this is so, welfare reform will surely test the collective intelligence of local leaders. Again and again in our discussions, we encountered contrary assessments of the same basic reality, one couched in the language of threat, the other in the language of opportunity (see Table 4). Sometimes the assessments came from the same speaker, who could see “two sides of the coin,” or imagine a variety of outcomes contingent upon local choices. In other cases they came from different speakers, some focused more intently on threats and others on opportunities. The most significant examples follow.

Child Care:

Significant new funding for child care is seen as a great opportunity to expand the number of child care slots available, create jobs (including some for welfare recipients), and educate parents. But alongside this is the sense that the new funds will still be insufficient to create the type and quantity of new slots needed, and the quality of care desired. Many fear children will be left with substandard caregivers, or to fend for themselves. On the positive side, it is agreed that children benefit from having working parents as a positive role model. But it was also noted that this will disrupt many young children as they are switched from the care of a trusted parent to new routines. The new consensus that everyone must work for aid is shared by most of those we spoke with, but they worry that it will undercut the rationale for an adequate safety net that insures the well-being of all children.

Table 4. Stakeholder Perceptions of Key Opportunities and Threats

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Opportunity</i>	<i>Threat</i>
Devolution	local flexibility	reduced federal resources
Reinventing Government	cross-train staff; improve image	mandates overwhelm capacity; turf battles
Tight Timelines/Sanctions	urgency spurs change	unrealistic expectations
County Budgets	increase in block grant \$	rising G.A. costs
Workforce Development	some new \$ for partnerships	lack of jobs
Child Care	increased funding	need outpaces supply
Safety Net	renewed focus on children	many fall through the cracks
Migration	people move to jobs	community instability

Workforce Development:

A number of individuals view welfare reform as a great opportunity for communities to focus their workforce development efforts through public discussion and new partnerships. They particularly welcome new collaboration among job training programs, community colleges, and social service departments. Others noted that the development of community service work can potentially add to the county’s economic base by training workers and providing needed public goods. At the same time, the most frequently mentioned threats in our conversations were the lack of jobs, the low pay in entry-level work, the difficulty getting people to where the jobs are, and the competition between welfare recipients and others (e.g. the working poor, those currently unemployed, new immigrants) for available jobs. While this was especially of concern in the rural counties, it was voiced in urban areas as well: “Where are the jobs? They’re sure not in San Diego,” said one leader, despite the county’s relatively robust economy. Leaders fear that a host of social ills could follow as individuals are dropped from aid programs, including increased crime rates, homelessness, child abuse, etc. Crime was a particularly widespread concern, and linked by some to the growth of the drug trade as an “illegal economy.”

Community Solidarity:

Many credit welfare reform with opening up new conversations between social service agencies (both public and non-profit) and members of the business community and general public, who have not typically shown interest in welfare recipients except as ideological stereotypes. The fact that many retail businesses will take a

financial hit from food stamp and SSI funding cuts and that potential increases in the county General Assistance budget could force cuts in popular programs adds to the possibility that welfare will come to be seen as a problem of the entire community, not just the individuals on aid. But respondents were not encouraging when asked how the community was responding to date. In most instances they indicated the public was still uninformed or apathetic. Some saw this as evidence that reform would fail, because it will be viewed as “another government operation” rather than a community reform and development process owned by all. More problematically, some respondents report a climate of fear, confusion and mistrust in their community, particularly among client groups and the immigrant community. For example, a report explaining the poor turnout at a community forum in San Diego, where intense and sophisticated outreach efforts had failed, cited “consistent stories about the level of fear and mistrust in the hearts and minds of community members who are destined to be involved in these changes.”

Reinventing Government:

Some county welfare officials see welfare reform as an opportunity to build institutional capacity by cross-training eligibility workers so that they can do more than simply process paper. One respondent sees this upgrading as part of a larger effort to “turn the organization into an entity that is known for really helping people get their lives together.” At the same time, it is widely perceived that turf battles, red tape, union concerns and ego walls will impede the necessary changes, and that the tight timelines imposed will overwhelm the capacity of even the most able and forward-looking departments. Some agency staff fear that rather than being seen as “helpers” they will instead bear the brunt of what clients perceive as punitive and invasive policies.

Fiscal Consequences:

One key area of uncertainty concerns the fiscal consequences of welfare reform. The prospect that General Assistance obligations will rise and drain discretionary funds from county budgets is a common fear. Under current law, counties are required to pay the full cost of General Assistance for adults who are not covered under other welfare programs. If a significant number of individuals are cut off aid through the welfare programs and then apply for General Assistance, county general funds would be severely impacted. For example, Sacramento County estimates that welfare reform could generate more than \$6 million in new General Assistance payments. This issue (among others) was responsible for the early and ongoing political mobilization of county government representatives and their associations in attempting to shape state welfare policy. To date, efforts to either eliminate the General Assistance obligation (as the Governor proposed) or to have the state share in its cost (as proposed by the counties and legislature) have not succeeded.

Some respondents focused on the opportunity provided by the infusion of substantial new money into county social service departments and economic development agencies in the coming year, money that can fuel creative partnerships and expansion of existing programs. Others were more attuned to how cuts in food stamps and SSI will overburden the capacity and fiscal resources of community-based social service agencies, who must deal with significant increases in the number of individuals who cannot meet basic needs. For example, Sacramento County officials have estimated that the combined impact of budget cuts will drain \$180 million from the local economy over the next five years, the equivalent of closing a major military base.

Migration Patterns:

The potential impact of welfare reform on migration patterns came up repeatedly in the interviews. Many leaders, particularly in the rural counties, believe that local welfare recipients will “move to where the jobs are.” On the other hand, some pointed out that rural areas have become magnets for aid recipients because of the low cost of living (particularly housing costs). The perception that the job shortage would be eased by migration out of the county seems to be a comforting (though perhaps illusory) fallback position for leaders who see no way to create the number of jobs required. A special case of migration involves the Hmong community, who were

relocated to California after the Vietnam War. We heard repeatedly that large numbers of Hmong from California's Central Valley were relocating to either the Southeast (North Carolina was frequently mentioned) or the Great Lakes region.

Political Calculations:

Finally, we encountered contrasting and contradictory perceptions of the role political calculations have played in driving welfare reform. For every leader who questioned the President's motives for signing the bill or blasted the plan as "being written by Congressional staff who don't have a clue how welfare programs work," there were others who were resigned that "like it or not, the reforms are here to stay, and we might as well make the most of them." In like fashion, while leaders feared that tight, politically inspired timelines would undermine their ability to move incrementally and learn gradually from experience, they also saw benefits to be gained by the dramatic new focus of attention which would likely dissipate if the threat of sanctions was less imminent.

Observations and Analysis

What do these early planning indications and stakeholder perceptions suggest about the future of welfare reform and its impact on the well-being of California communities? The preliminary data we have presented is too sketchy to support strong generalizations. But by juxtaposing what we have learned in this inquiry with insights from the policy implementation and community development literature, we can identify a set of questions that help frame the debate.

Is this the old story of "implementation overload" or the new story of government that promises less and delivers more reliably?

Successful policy implementation is most likely when goals are simple, resources are ample, and actors are unified. None of these conditions is met in the case of welfare reform. Key goals—protecting children, maintaining work incentives, and lowering public costs—are sweeping and contradictory. New resources for child care and job creation do not appear adequate to the task and are overshadowed by the more than \$40 billion to be cut from federal social welfare spending over the next five years. And while there is substantial unity around the idea that welfare "needs to be fixed," there is very little consensus among the various stakeholders on what should take its place. We can expect conflict to heighten as the policy focus shifts from incantation of abstract goals to difficult tradeoffs among those goals, and hard choices about the means of achieving them.

Given all this, welfare reform seems doomed to repeat a familiar pattern in which high expectations generated in Washington ("ending welfare as we know it") meet up with inadequate state and local capacity to deliver on the promise. *But does the old pattern fit, given the altered premises operative in new welfare policies?* These policies posit not so much a new government program, as a new compact between government and the people. Government is to promise less and do less, while individuals and communities take greater responsibility for themselves. Major features of the new policy clearly delineate a more limited role for government, especially the elimination of the AFDC entitlement, the imposition of time limits and work participation requirements for recipients, and cuts in key safety net programs like food stamps and SSI.

It is clear that these policies will place more responsibility on welfare recipients for being self-sufficient, and on community organizations for insuring an adequate safety net. To the extent that the real goal of the reform is to shrink the size and cost of government, welfare reform is by definition a success. The more difficult question is whether it is reasonable to expect local communities to succeed where the old welfare system failed. Can they craft simple goals, apply ample resources, and unify actors? This remains unclear. The most hopeful case that can be made is that the work participation quotas set by the federal legislation have *de facto* become the clear

goal for local efforts; that the “windfall” of block grant money counties will receive will provide more resources than ever before; and that various local actors have united around the idea that all able-bodied adults should be working. Unknown at this point is the degree to which recipients and communities are up to the new responsibilities, how active a role local governments will take in the new regime, and how extended and costly the transition will be.

Are the immediate fruits all we can expect or will welfare reform realize its long-term promise?

If we are to believe the arguments of its most vocal proponents, determining the success of welfare will take a generation or more, as we see whether children escape the cycle of poverty and dependency that trapped their parents. On the other hand, it may be that much of what welfare reform can realistically achieve is coming to pass even before the reforms have taken firm root. One case in point is the 11% decline in welfare rolls nationally during the past year (8% in California). While the booming economy explains part of this reduction, welfare directors we have spoken with believe that welfare reform is driving the more employable and enterprising aid recipients to get jobs before there aren't enough to go around. As this population leaves the rolls, the remaining recipients will include many who will be much tougher to employ in the private sector.

The other dramatic early result of the new legislation is a sharp increase in the number of immigrants seeking naturalization. Nationally, 1.1 million immigrants became citizens in 1996, an increase of more than 100% over 1995 levels. In Northern California, increases of about 60% are reported (Northern California Coalition for Immigrant Rights, 1997). Again, welfare reform is not solely responsible, but the reforms clearly have prompted new naturalization activities. Both county governments and a variety of non-profit groups and partnerships have been offering literacy programs, civics classes, and help negotiating the formal naturalization procedures.

The political and civic implications of these two trends remain to be seen. Better documentation and understanding of how these trends are altering the social and demographic make-up of California's low-income population is needed to inform future policy development.

Will welfare reform strengthen existing community networks or overwhelm still fragile partnerships?

Welfare reform is being publicly touted as a radical break with the past. But local leaders were quick to indicate many areas of continuity between the new reforms and ongoing programs. Many of the most proactive planning activities we encountered were based in local human services collaboratives which have sprung up throughout California over the past decade. Examples include the idea of “one-stop” employment centers, “work first,” “Healthy Start,” and other collaborative efforts to integrate service delivery effort in a more efficient and holistic manner. As was the case with the New Deal policies to which welfare reform is now compared, national legislation perceived as path-breaking has in many ways simply freed space for reform movements that have been evolving for some time at the state and local level.

The role of community networks in local service delivery and policy development has been receiving growing attention in the fields of public administration and organizational theory. O'Toole (1997, p. 46) refers to networks as “webs of public, not-for-profit, and business organizations in crosscutting configurations.” Wolch (1990) describes the result, common to most Western democracies, as a growing “shadow state” spurred on by welfare state retrenchment and the transfer of many social responsibilities from government to the voluntary sector. It is unclear what these partnerships will do to the respective roles of non-profit organizations, state agencies, and private businesses. At their best, networks represent a renewed community effort to address problems collectively. For example, we saw evidence in many counties of non-profits providing entrepreneurial leadership that helps county government solve problems and create new approaches. At their worst, networks may co-opt the energies of voluntary organizations, making them more dependent on government support and funding and thus blunting their advocacy for disadvantaged groups.

La Porte (1996) notes that as traditional service delivery hierarchies decline there is a need for empirical and conceptual work that illuminates network dynamics, particularly the conditions that facilitate trust or mistrust within networks. It is much easier to agree that coordination and partnership are needed than it is to actually link program components in a reasonable sequence. Conflict is inevitable given organizations with different time frames, internal objectives and sense of urgency. As Aaron Wildavsky once put it, “Everyone wants coordination—on his own terms” (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1979, p. 134).

It is easy to criticize bureaucracy for its elevation of procedure over purpose. But will the new partnerships be able to recreate the benefits of bureaucratic predictability—the reasonable expectation that multiple actors will cooperate to achieve an agreed upon set of goals? We need to know much more than we currently do about the details of partnership relations (how quickly phone calls are returned, whether the most able staff are assigned to collaborative functions, etc.), and the balance of formal mechanisms (written agreements, financial commitments, etc.) and informal norms (interpersonal loyalty, shared desire to work together, etc.) in promoting accountability among partners (Bardach and Lesser, 1996; DeLapp, 1993, 1997).

One recent study compared the experience of five states who have pioneered the devolution of human services administration from the state level to community partnerships. In every case the same dilemma was encountered: how to provide discipline for the collaboration given that the old rules of bureaucratic hierarchy no longer apply. The author (Page, 1997, p. 1) found that:

Successful proponents of disciplined collaboration create iterative opportunities to assess and revise key actors’ roles and responsibilities in the new system. Regular assessment and revision can make possible continuous improvements in the technical effectiveness of services for children and families, which in turn may increase the new system’s political popularity over time.

Page found that where broad-based participation and critical reflection are encouraged, community partnerships tend to be more successful both technically (in delivering services) and politically (in generating support). The key is replacing the discipline of hierarchic rules with the self-discipline, mutual accountability and continuous learning of a working team.

Will counties have the institutional capacity to deal with workforce and economic development challenges?

There are two distinct challenges. The first is the need to reorient local economic development strategies given the increasing unreliability of older strategies based on industrial recruitment, government grants or extraction of natural resources (Blakely, 1989; Bruyn and Meehan, 1987; Fosler, 1991; Gunn and Gunn, 1991). By contrast, “sustainable development” or “community-controlled economic development” acknowledges local constraints, develops existing assets, plugs economic leaks, captures value-added locally and supports local business (Ayres et al., 1990; Fossum, 1993; Kinsley, 1992; Thomas, 1990). While a growing literature suggests the potential of the new approach, many existing economic development organizations remain substantially wedded to the older strategies. Whether they can be transformed or replaced, and whether pursuit of the new approach actually will pay the hoped-for dividends, remain to be seen.

The second challenge has to do with finding the capacity to handle the job readiness problems of “hard core” welfare recipients. Much of the existing education and job training infrastructure has been designed to meet the needs of workers who have been temporarily unemployed and need retraining. These will be appropriate for the most readily employable of welfare recipients, but not for the 1/3 to 2/3 (estimates vary) of the current recipient population that have much more significant barriers to employment. The need to link workforce development efforts to mental health, substance abuse and other services will be critical, but represents new terrain for many local communities. Especially in rural counties, it is unclear whether there is sufficient institutional infrastructure to support this effort.

Will thoughtful deliberation replace exchange of rhetoric?

Welfare has long been one of the most bitterly contested areas of American public policy, and the debate over welfare reform at both the federal and state levels has been characterized by harsh partisan rhetoric. Against this backdrop, one of the most encouraging trends we encountered in local communities was widespread evidence that welfare reform has opened up new “civic spaces,” arenas in which thoughtful communication may occur. As one county welfare reform coordinator put it, “I’ve been surprised at how thoughtful everyone has been. With very few exceptions, people are asking the right questions and not engaging in the kind of rhetoric which has characterized the welfare debate for so long.”

In part this can be explained by the fact that local communities must operate within the parameters set by federal policy decisions, which automatically narrows the arena for debate and contention. But that fact doesn’t detract from the positive energy being generated by communication that crosses previous boundaries. Leaders described this happening among different county government agencies, between county programs and voluntary sector organizations, and to a lesser degree with the business community and broader public. A key question will be whether this conversation will be sustained as initial hopes for welfare reform meet up with the gritty difficulties of change, and the realities of community conflict.

Will the process of implementing welfare reform revitalize “civil society,” or confirm its decline?

Our approach to this inquiry has been shaped by the renewed attention across the social sciences to the relationships among civic life, economic prosperity, and effective governance. Among the important assertions associated with this literature is the role of social capital (i.e. relationships and networks bound by trust and norms of reciprocity) in promoting healthy local economies and political democracy (Coleman, 1990; Flora, 1995; Putnam, 1993); the role of citizenship and attachment to place as the ground for more stable personal identity and less polarized community politics (Kemmis, 1990, 1995; Sennett, 1996); and the role of civil society in shaping a more compelling sense of moral obligation than either the market or state alone (Wolfe, 1989).

County leaders were quick to acknowledge that “for welfare reform to succeed, the whole community must be involved.” But there must be healthy local institutions and associations that can mobilize and channel that involvement. The decline of “mediating institutions”—churches, neighborhood associations, private charities, civic clubs, unions, and other voluntary associations—is a long standing and widely lamented trend in American life. While it is hoped that devolution will revitalize these institutions by encouraging community self-sufficiency rather than reliance on big government, this cannot be taken for granted. As yet we know very little about how local institutions will interact to shape the course of welfare reform in particular communities. To what degree will prior levels of social capital play a determining role in the success or failure of welfare reform in particular communities? Will the end of the federal entitlement leave the poor at the mercy of market dynamics, or will civic groups renew and expand community charities and services? Will a common sense of place shape a new sense of civic participation and obligation, or will the need for work create migration which weakens community ties? All these questions deserve our attention as implementation proceeds.

Looking Ahead: Key Issues to Track

Many of the most telling details of welfare reform remain to be worked out. As counties create their local plans, the following issues will be particularly important to track:

- what outcome measures are agreed on, and how are these tracked?
- what criteria are used to determine exemptions from work requirements?
- how is federal job creation money channeled and put to use, and to what effect?
- what community-service work programs are created, how are they managed, do they provide public goods and valuable training, and how are they perceived politically?
- how are new child care funds put to use, and with what effect?
- what political fallout occurs, particularly around the issue of sanctions and the level of public support for “safety net” policies?

Beyond these programmatic components, we need to keep sight of the effect of welfare reform on community identity, cohesion, and spirit. The prospect of welfare reform has unleashed new civic energy in communities. The county leaders we interviewed were surprisingly upbeat, even optimistic. Most believe that welfare reform will enable their work to take on a new integrity. Instead of being trapped in the old welfare system which compromised their deepest aspirations, they envision a new correspondence between what they believe and what they do. For government welfare employees, this means shifting from the role of fraud detector and “paper pusher” to providing tangible aid that enables clients to become self-sufficient. For participants in community partnerships, it means seeing their effort actually result in a healthier community where satisfying work abounds and children are well nurtured. For recipients, it means being respected as contributing members of the community, and as parents who are struggling valiantly to care for their children despite substantial obstacles.

Though we have talked to individuals in widely divergent communities, and from different backgrounds and political persuasions, there was a surprising level of agreement about the central element of the new system. At the heart of most county plans will be a more integrated system of case management, in which the job readiness of potential clients is assessed, and individual plans tailored to their needs and family situations are developed by teams of public and non-profit service providers, supported by community partnerships. The hope is that the flexibility of this system, combined with the threat of time limits, will provide a viable alternative to “welfare as we have known it.”

For some this hope will seem an earnest but futile dream, doomed by staff shortages, turf wars, and a paucity of jobs paying livable wages. For others it may seem a paternalistic intrusion on the rights of the poor, an ever-more intrusive state presence in individual lives. But there remains the possibility that these plans will instead lead to a result many would applaud: the application of public resources with care and respect to help the poor make tangible improvements in their lives, and to build more cohesive communities. Whether this occurs will depend not only on the competent design of new systems, or the adequacy of funding, but on the levels of trust, empathy, and self-reflection exhibited by the human beings who must cooperate to achieve results.

Failures are inevitable in an undertaking of this scope, and the track record of welfare policy is not encouraging for those who desire instant results. The most successful communities will build in ways to learn from their mistakes, making frequent and repeated mid-course corrections. These communities will not only adjust the means for achieving objectives, but the objectives themselves, as they rethink what it is they really want. Whether their welfare reform plans succeed or fail, these “learning communities” will at least emerge less puzzled.

APPENDIX A. Interview Questions for Study of Early Stages of Welfare Reform in Six Counties, Spring 1997.

1. What is your personal involvement and that of your organization in the welfare reform effort in this county?
2. Welfare reform will likely be different in different counties due to their particular characteristics. What particular features of your county are important to help us understand how welfare reform will proceed here?
3. Who are the key players in the welfare reform effort here? (Map out on paper.)
 - a. What formal linkages exist among these players?
 - b. What relationships does your organization have with others in the network?
 - c. What is missing on this map of the network—is anyone excluded?
4. Each county is being asked to plan and design its own service and delivery systems. What planning activities have been undertaken to date in this county?
 - a. How has your organization been involved in these activities?
 - b. From your perspective, what should be key elements of the plan?
 - c. Are there written documents that describe planning activities, position papers, etc. that would help us understand the planning process?
5. How involved has the community been in the planning process?
6. What efforts have been made to educate the public about welfare reform and how successful have these been?
7. If you had to sum up the situation in your county at this point in time, what would you say are the major challenges or threats posed by welfare reform, and what are the major opportunities?
8. As a result of welfare reform, what changes have occurred already or will likely occur in the relationships among agencies and organizations in the network?

Appendix B. Summaries of County Welfare Reform Planning Activities.

Following are brief summaries of welfare reform planning activities in each of the six sample counties. The information reflects activities prior to our interviews during April and May, 1997 (except for Butte, where we conducted interviews in July, 1997).

Butte County

The county Department of Social Services appointed a welfare reform coordinator in mid-July, 1997. As of that time there was no formal planning process in place, nor any public planning document issued. Some respondents indicated a reluctance to commit much time to planning before the parameters of the state plan are clearly known. Some planning has been happening, however. Beginning two years ago, before federal legislation was even on the horizon, the Private Industry Council (PIC), Employment Development Department (EDD), and Department of Social Services (DSS) began planning "one-stop" community employment centers. Leaders of these agencies report a high degree of mutual trust, which facilitated planning and speeded the opening of "one-stop" centers in Chico, Oroville and Paradise. The earliest of these has been in operation since the fall of 1996, and staff now have experience with implementing a welfare-to-work approach in a context where overcoming differences in agency culture and regulatory requirements is a significant challenge.

The local Child Care Planning Council has brought together a diverse group of local stakeholders and created a matrix of child care needs and goals. At least one County Supervisor has been repeatedly raising the issue of welfare reform in community meetings. With urging from her, the Chico Chamber of Commerce has created a new welfare reform task force which will meet for the first time in August 1997.

No umbrella structure coordinates non-profit activities, but individual directors from three of the larger non-profits have spearheaded various facets of welfare reform planning, both within their own organizations and in the community planning groups mentioned above. In two cases these Directors have close relationships with county officials and are heavily dependent on government funding sources, while the third is relatively more independent and isolated. Little systematic effort has been made to inform the general public or involve the community in planning, although DSS has held one community-wide forum and several meetings with clients. One informant noted that while it would be nice to spend time developing a community consensus, it would detract from the ability of key players to move quickly and get things done. Some outreach by agencies to the business community has occurred, but there is little indication to date of significant buy-in or support.

Kern County

County leaders have enthusiastically embraced the welfare-to-work idea, even prior to the passage of federal welfare reform. Kern Works, a welfare-to-work program, was inaugurated in 1995 and in February 1996 held its first major public event designed to bring together job seekers and potential employers. The county's welfare office has been physically remade to resemble an employment office, complete with motivational posters. "One-stop career centers" were opened in the county in 1996. Official welfare reform planning activities are coordinated by the Director of the Department of Human Services.

During the fall of 1996, a welfare reform platform was developed and in December of 1996 it was approved by the Board of Supervisors. The platform identified four county priorities: local flexibility; job creation; privatization; and regulatory relief for business. A Business Advisory Team was created by the Department of Human Services in December 1996 to address welfare reform. It started meeting in January, 1997, when subcommittees of community representatives were formed to deal with the topics of regulatory relief, community awareness, child care, culture of poverty, jobs/training/economic development, and privatization.

Planning for child care has been coordinated by The Kern County Network for Children, an appointed advisory body within the Office of the Superintendent of Schools. It started analysis of welfare reform in the fall of 1996, and produced an “issue grid” identifying how welfare reform is expected to impact children and families. This effort has a high profile in the community, due to historically poor indicators of children’s well-being (infant mortality, etc.) and recent, highly publicized cases of children dying from abuse.

Community-based organizations are well-represented on subcommittees of the Business Advisory Team, and helped produce the Kern County Network for Children analysis. In general, however, the level of non-profit involvement in planning is small compared to the central role played by county agencies. In a couple of instances, key non-profit organizations and their leaders have developed partnerships with county government. For example, some non-profit positions are funded with county funds.

Department of Human Services representatives have given a large number of detailed presentations to community groups. In addition, some input on welfare reform plans has been funneled from “neighborhood collaboratives” previously established in low-income areas by “community empowerment team” representatives. These organizations, along with the more than 50 Healthy Start collaboratives (a school-based service delivery program) in the county, provide a potential institutional base for further planning and implementation.

Sacramento County

The Department of Human Assistance (DHA) has taken the lead in welfare reform planning. A top agency planner was reassigned full-time to head the planning effort in September, 1996, earlier than in any of the other sample counties. A welfare reform planning document, called “Visions” and published in January, 1997, is exemplary in its level of detail, articulation of basic principles, coverage of issues, and openness to community involvement in the planning process. In February, 1997, the Board of Supervisors approved a lengthy list of policy and program recommendations put forward in “Visions,” including the creation of a Welfare-to-Work Policy Board with representatives of the Board of Supervisors, city councils, community colleges, and the County Office of Education.

In general, the planning process has been proactive and participatory, with a wide variety of welfare reform programs and partnerships already underway or being planned. Significant improvements in communication and collaboration are reported within and among county departments and the “joint powers authorities” set up by the city and county. This is particularly true among the DHA, the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Authority (SHRA), and the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA). For example, SHRA has set aside space in public housing units for SETA’s “one-stop” employment service centers, and has conducted a pre-apprentice program. DHA has joined with the Community Services Planning Council (CSPC; an umbrella organization representing non-profit groups), the Human Service Coordinating Council (an advisory body appointed by the Board of Supervisors), California State University, and the League of Women Voters to sponsor seven town hall meetings during April and May, 1997. DHA staff have also been very active making presentations to, and receiving input from, a large number of community organizations.

The presence of the Community Service Planning Council as an umbrella organization to coordinate and educate non-profit groups, and advocate for their inclusion in county government planning efforts, has contributed to a high level of non-profit participation in the planning process. For example, the Sacramento Association of Community-Based Organizations (SACBO), a long-standing coalition of 50 health and human service organizations, set up welfare reform subcommittees in the fall of 1996 and

will present recommendations to the Human Services Coordinating Council. Although we heard some concern by non-profits that DHA's internal planning teams may not incorporate as much of the non-profit input as they could, especially if the timeline for producing a formal county plan is rushed, the general climate is one of trust and respect.

The county has many active neighborhood organizations, and the tie between these and county government is growing stronger as DHA seeks to reorganize itself along geographic (neighborhood) lines. At least two neighborhood organizations have made welfare reform a high priority, and one of these has published a neighborhood plan detailing how 15 nonprofit and government partners will coordinate welfare-to-work activities for community residents. In addition, a number of faith-based organizations have become active in welfare reform, holding forums and participating in partnerships. One of these links the Sacramento Valley Organizing Committee (a faith-based community organization), a local food bank, and the Teamsters union in a plan to create new jobs for welfare recipients as truck drivers.

San Diego County

With strong support from the County Board of Supervisors, the recently appointed County Administrative Officer (from a corporate business background) has made welfare reform a high priority. He is pushing to get the county "out in front" on this issue and has directed that a county plan be in place by July, 1997 [Note: The plan has been adopted on schedule]. A full-time welfare reform coordinator was appointed in October, 1996, and a major reorganization of county health and human services departments is occurring simultaneously with welfare reform. A Welfare Reform Executive Council made up of top county agency officials produced a draft county plan, "Welfare-to-Work in San Diego County," in December, 1996 and sponsored a community forum in February, 1997. The draft was deliberately labeled a "work in progress," pending input from 10 issue focus groups (job placement; child care; self-sufficiency; advocacy/media; faith community; education and training; law enforcement and criminal justice; system redesign; health; community and volunteers). Focus groups were open to all interested community members, and many non-profit leaders and some welfare recipients participated. Recognizing that the focus group membership did not adequately reflect all segments of the community, particularly low-income groups, the county asked 10 "community collaboratives" established under AB 1741 to hold focus groups in their local areas. By April, a clear plan was in place to process input from the issue and community engagement focus groups.

Welfare reform planning has increased communication among government agencies. For example, EDD, the Private Industry Council and the Adult and Employment Services agency are meeting to coordinate their efforts. Similarly, Adult and Employment Services is making new inroads with public transit officials to expand routes that connect low-income residents with jobs. In addition, two neighborhood service centers are experimenting with a new intake process oriented to assess job readiness.

In general, the County has been active in seeking out grassroots input, and the prior existence of the community collaboratives has provided an institutional vehicle for encouraging participation. A "can-do" spirit appears to permeate the community, such that many community leaders, including local business leaders, are devising plans and solutions on their own initiative. For example, the community collaborative in the city of Chula Vista spun off a new group, South Bay Solutions, which has launched a program to provide funds and support services that enable businesses to hire welfare recipients. The county's GAIN program (Greater Avenues to Independence, funded with state workfare funds), the Chula Vista Chamber of Commerce, and Episcopal Social Services are key partners in the effort, which provides volunteer mentors for new workers.

Tulare County

The Health and Human Services Department set up a Welfare Reform Committee in September, 1996, with representatives from county departments, non-profit groups associated with the Social Services Association, and the Private Industry Council. Subcommittees dealing with child welfare, safety net, employment and training, naturalization, support services, and health/mental health were established in December, 1996, after a meeting between the Social Services Association and the Welfare Reform Committee. As of April, meetings of these subcommittees had been few in number. A 25% time welfare reform coordinator was appointed in January, 1997, but is significantly constrained by other duties and limited staff support.

A County Supervisor acted independently to create a Committee on Government Assistance Reform in January, 1997. Membership on the committee, which provides a forum for community input, is broad-based (but by invitation only), and includes public agencies, non-profits, business, etc. The county's welfare reform coordinator provides staff support. The GAIN program has been moved into the Health and Human Services department, and is headed by a former county Chief Administrative Officer.

Most local contacts report "feeling behind" in the planning effort compared to where they wish to be and to other counties. The Social Services Association, representing important non-profits, has been instrumental in advocating for more proactive planning and is well-represented on the current committees. Their leaders are still unsure how meaningful their involvement will be. In general, cooperation among non-profits is reported to be "guarded," and the quality of non-profit leadership as "uneven." Community and neighborhood involvement in planning has been minimal. No public forums have been held and the business community only recently has been engaged in planning discussions.

Ventura County

The county has a national reputation for pioneering the "Ventura Model," developed in the 1980s to provide for more integrated service delivery in mental health. Beginning more than two years ago, Ventura developed its own welfare reform plan, known as PRIDE (Partnerships to Restore Independence and Dignity through Employment). More recent planning efforts have been hindered by turnover at the top of key county agencies. The Board of Supervisors has been aggressive in seeking funding for PRIDE, first by seeking a direct grant from the federal government, then by seeking state legislation to fund Ventura as a pilot county for welfare reform. Both efforts ultimately failed, but the work done enabled the county to publish a draft PRIDE implementation plan in January, 1997. The four priorities identified by the Board of Supervisors are: local flexibility; child care; transportation; and eligibility.

The Public Social Services Agency set up a welfare reform committee in October, 1996, with task forces on automation; eligibility; assessment and case management; education and training; temporary and permanent employment; child care; child support; housing; transportation; medical insurance; fiscal; legal; evaluation; and legislation. To date, the task force process is described as "abbreviated." The PRIDE plan identifies 18 measurable objectives for evaluating county welfare reform efforts, and has assigned a staff person to collect baseline data. Pilot "one-stop" employment centers have been established in key locations.

The PRIDE plan was drafted primarily by members of the Board of Supervisors and top county agency personnel, with minimal input from non-profit groups, businesses, or the community at-large. It appears that only two or three non-profit leaders familiar to county officials have played significant roles in the planning process to date. County leaders we spoke with recognize a need to begin engaging the community more directly, but as of May, 1997 no public forums had been held.

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