

# USING THE CALIFORNIA SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD IN PRACTICE

---

IDEAS FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC  
AGENCIES WORKING TO HELP FAMILIES MOVE  
OUT OF POVERTY

***Principal Author***

Aimee Durfee

***Edited by***

Tse Ming Tam & Susie Suafai

**September 2004**

*All Rights Reserved. Copyright © 2004 National Economic Development and Law Center*

---

NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LAW  
CENTER



# BACKGROUND

---

## NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LAW CENTER

The National Economic Development and Law Center, established in 1969, is a non-profit public interest law and planning organization that specializes in community economic development. It works in collaboration with community organizations, private foundations, corporations and government agencies to build the human, social, and economic capacities of low-income communities and their residents. NEDLC helps to create both strong, sustainable community institutions that can act as "change agents," and an effective local infrastructure for their support.

This report was produced as part of the Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency (CFESS) project, a statewide coalition managed by NEDLC. CFESS focuses on program and policy change that helps families move from poverty to economic self-sufficiency. The CFESS coalition is made up of human services organizations, public agencies, microenterprise organizations, grassroots groups, job training and educational institutions, and many others. Through CFESS, NEDLC publishes the California Self-Sufficiency Standard, and promotes the adoption of the Standard by nonprofit organizations, public agencies and foundations.

CFESS is also part of a National Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project, a network of similar coalitions around the country that promote the Self-Sufficiency Standard. NEDLC was a co-founder of this national effort, and continues to serve in an advisory capacity on the national level.

For more information about the CFESS state coalition or the California Self-Sufficiency Standard, please contact 510-251-2600 ext. 127 or email [cfess@nedlc.org](mailto:cfess@nedlc.org).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding for this report was generously provided by the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, the Walter and Elise Haas Fund, and the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund. NEDLC would also like to thank all the organizations that took the time to respond to our survey and share their experiences, without which this publication would not be possible.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

I	<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
	- The Problem: California Families Struggling to Make Ends Meet	
	- Why We Did This Report	
	- Major Findings	
II	<b>Background on the Self-Sufficiency Standard</b> .....	7
	- How can the Standard be used to help families move out of poverty?	
III	<b>Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard As a Counseling &amp; Educational Tool</b> ....	9
	- Costs Associated With Using the Standard	
	- Effects and Outcomes Resulting from Use of the Standard	
	- Challenges Associated with Using the Standard	
IV	<b>Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard As a Benchmarking and Evaluation Tool</b> .....	14
	- Costs Associated With Using the Standard	
	- Effects and Outcomes Resulting from Use of the Standard	
	- Challenges Associated with Using the Standard	
V	<b>Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard As a Policymaking Tool for Public Agencies &amp; Legislative Bodies</b> .....	19
	- Local Workforce Investment Boards	
	- State and Local Legislative Bodies	
	- Costs Associated With Using the Standard	
	- Effects and Outcomes Resulting from Use of the Standard	
	- Challenges Associated with Using the Standard	
VI	<b>Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard As a Planning Tool</b> .....	25
	- Challenges Associated with Using the Standard	
VII	<b>Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard As a Persuasive Tool</b> .....	27
	- Challenges Associated with Using the Standard	
VIII	<b>Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard As a Data Tool</b> .....	30
	- Challenges Associated with Using the Standard	
IX	<b>Recommendations</b> .....	32



# INTRODUCTION

---

## *The Problem: California Families Struggling to Make Ends Meet*

Community groups, foundations, job training organizations and public agencies in California are using a tool that has enabled them to better help their clients and members move from poverty to economic independence: the Self-Sufficiency Standard. The Self-Sufficiency Standard describes the basic costs required to make ends meet for working families. The Standard has the ability to illustrate the vast and common underestimation of poverty perpetuated by widespread use of the Federal Poverty Line. By using the Self-Sufficiency Standard, we can see that the number of families struggling to make ends meet is actually larger than commonly recognized. As a result, those families' needs are rarely recognized by public agencies that use traditional measures of poverty.

In June of 2003, the National Economic Development and Law Center released a report finding that **3 out of 10 households** in California have incomes too low to pay for basic needs. In comparison, using the Federal Poverty Line as a measure, about 1 out of 10 California households had incomes below poverty. Other facts in the report revealed more about these households:

- More than half (52%) of households with a child under six have inadequate income;
- More than half of Latino households and more than one-third of African American households have incomes too low to pay for basic needs;
- Of families whose incomes are below the Self-Sufficiency Standard, over one-half have at least one worker working full-time year round.

Clearly, the struggle to pay for basic needs (otherwise known as poverty) is creeping up on more and more families, and yet "poverty" is often regarded as an issue that affects a small minority. Because the Self-Sufficiency Standard is a more accurate and updated measure of basic costs for working families, it can be a powerful tool to help clarify this problem and help families reach economic self-sufficiency, through policy change and program change. This report documents how organizations, public agencies and foundations are using the Standard in their programs to help families all over California move out of poverty and towards economic independence.

## *Why We Did This Report*

The National Economic Development and Law Center is aware that many agencies are using the California Self-Sufficiency Standard for a variety of purposes. We embarked on this research to answer the question: “What is the **impact** of using the Self-Sufficiency Standard?” The impetus for this report grew out of our experience of presenting the Standard to public officials for formal adoption, and continuously being asked about the implications of using the Standard in practice. We set out to learn *why* organizations use the Standard, as well as the *costs* of using the Standard, and the *challenges* and the *benefits* of using this tool. Designed as a guide for people who want to begin using the Standard in their programs, this report documents different ways the Self-Sufficiency Standard has been used around the state by nonprofits, foundations and public agencies.

NEDLC conducted a survey of 37 organizations and public agencies between September 2003 and September 2004. Survey respondents were either interviewed over the phone or in person, and/or completed a written survey that was emailed or faxed to NEDLC. Many submitted supporting materials, including policies adopted or evaluation reports. Survey respondents did not review this report prior to publication, and any errors that may be contained herein about particular programs are the sole responsibility of NEDLC.

## *Major Findings*

In the course of this research, a number of themes stood out prominently:

- The Self-Sufficiency Standard is a unique and necessary source of information for public agencies and nonprofits, because it is one of the only resources that accurately and credibly describes basic cost of living for working families.
- The Standard is regarded as a credible enough measure to be adopted by legislative action in public agencies, specifically local Workforce Investment Boards.
- The Standard is useful with clients as a part of their career and training decisionmaking process, although it can seem out-of-reach to clients with low skills or multiple barriers.
- The Standard can be effectively combined with census data to develop a portrait of a given community or population and their incomes relative to a basic needs budget.



- A major cost of using the Standard as a benchmarking and evaluation tool is to cover start-up costs of developing the intake system and analyzing the data produced.
- The actual financial cost of using the Self-Sufficiency Standard in a public agency is difficult to quantify and may vary according to policy choices. There is a potential cost savings from reduced recidivism when clients are placed in high-wage jobs that keep them out of the workforce training system. Additionally, respondents identified two ways in which a public agency can use the Standard to expand eligibility, each of which may have differing cost implications: 1) expand the *pool of eligible people* to include the working poor and/or 2) expand the *number of slots* available.

# BACKGROUND ON THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD

---

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is a calculation of basic costs required for working parents to support their families, on a county-by-county basis. It is calculated for 70 different family types, ranging from a single person with no children to single parents and two-parent families with 1, 2 and 3 children of varying ages (infant, preschool, schoolage and teenager).

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is a more accurate measure of need than the often-used Federal Poverty Line (FPL). The FPL is calculated only using the cost of food times three, and does not vary according to where one lives, or the ages of children in the household. The Standard includes the costs not only of food but also housing, child care, health care, transportation, miscellaneous costs, taxes and tax credits – all the basic costs required for a family to enter and remain in the workforce. The table on the next page is a sample Self-Sufficiency Standard for Alameda County. Full Self-Sufficiency Standards for each county of California can be found at [www.nedlc.org/cfess/cfess\\_registration.htm](http://www.nedlc.org/cfess/cfess_registration.htm).

Dr. Diana Pearce developed the concept of the Self-Sufficiency Standard in the mid-1990's, when she was working with Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW). Since its inception, the Standard has been calculated for 35 states by Wider Opportunities for Women and Dr. Pearce.<sup>1</sup> Under WOW's guidance, the Self-Sufficiency Standard is part of national network of state coalitions, called Family Economic Self-Sufficiency (FESS) projects. In California, the Self-Sufficiency Standard is published by the National Economic Development & Law Center, home of Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency (CFESS).

*How can the Standard be used to help families move out of poverty?*

The Self-Sufficiency Standard can be used in all kinds of ways, many of which will be discussed in more detail in this report. In general, the Standard can be used:

- as a **counseling and educational tool**;
- as a **benchmarking and evaluation tool**;
- as a **policymaking tool for public agencies**;
- as a **planning tool**;
- as a **persuasive tool**;
- and as a **data tool**.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Pearce is now the director of the Center for Women's Welfare at the University of Washington.



## SAMPLE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD

---

SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD ALAMEDA COUNTY, CA 2003								
				<i>Adult +</i>				<i>2 Adults +</i>
			<i>Adult +</i>	<i>infant +</i>			<i>2 Adults +</i>	<i>preschooler +</i>
		<i>Adult +</i>	<i>preschooler +</i>	<i>schoolage +</i>		<i>2 Adults +</i>	<i>infant +</i>	<i>preschooler +</i>
<i>Monthly Costs</i>	<i>Adult</i>	<i>infant</i>	<i>Schoolage</i>	<i>teenager</i>	<i>2 Adults</i>	<i>schoolage</i>	<i>preschooler</i>	<i>teenager</i>
<i>Housing</i>	1132	1420	1420	1947	1132	1420	1420	1947
<i>Child Care</i>	0	758	1319	1158	0	400	1677	1838
<i>Food</i>	182	266	411	541	358	490	515	648
<i>Transportation</i>	60	60	60	60	120	120	120	120
<i>Health Care</i>	67	182	212	239	212	231	239	289
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	144	269	342	394	182	266	397	484
<i>Taxes</i>	352	579	745	937	294	432	843	1183
<i>Earned Income Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Child Care Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	(55)	(100)	(100)	0	(58)	(100)	(100)
<i>Child Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	(83)	(167)	(250)	0	(83)	(167)	(250)
<i>Self-Sufficiency Wage -Hourly</i>								
	<b>\$11.00</b>	<b>\$19.29</b>	<b>\$24.10</b>	<b>\$27.99</b>	<b>\$6.53</b>	<b>\$9.14</b>	<b>\$14.05</b>	<b>\$17.50</b>
					<i>per adult</i>	<i>per adult</i>	<i>per adult</i>	<i>per adult</i>
<i>-Monthly</i>	<b>\$1,937</b>	<b>\$3,395</b>	<b>\$4,242</b>	<b>\$4,926</b>	<b>\$2,298</b>	<b>\$3,218</b>	<b>\$4,944</b>	<b>\$6,160</b>
<i>-Annual</i>	<b>\$23,240</b>	<b>\$40,736</b>	<b>\$50,907</b>	<b>\$59,114</b>	<b>\$27,581</b>	<b>\$38,611</b>	<b>\$59,328</b>	<b>\$73,918</b>

Full Self-Sufficiency Standards for each county of California can be found at  
[www.nedlc.org/cfess/cfess\\_registration.htm](http://www.nedlc.org/cfess/cfess_registration.htm).

# USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD AS A COUNSELING & EDUCATIONAL TOOL

---

By far, the most common way that organizations use the Self-Sufficiency Standard is as a counseling tool with clients who are trying to move out of poverty. Counselors told us that using the Standard gives clients and students a realistic sense of the type of income and/or subsidies they need to bring home in order to make ends meet. In general, counseling and education with the Standard occurs in primarily two ways:

- In a group educational setting, staff members use the Standard to raise awareness about the high cost of living, in conjunction with information about career/educational pathways that lead to self-sufficiency wage jobs.
- In a one-on-one individual counseling setting, staff members use the Standard to provide a long-term income goal for clients who are engaged in or considering job training, micro enterprise training or higher education. The Standard may be presented to clients, or it may be used only by counselors as a staff resource to guide client options. Counselors may choose the latter option if they believe that the income levels in the Standard might discourage the client.

“Women who are getting shuffled into places that are not beneficial need to see the whole picture. It’s unrealistic to assume that a person can survive on \$7 an hour with four children. The Self-Sufficiency Standard is a way to lead people out of dependency. When people are empowered with information, they will act.”

– job training counselor/consultant

Here are some examples of organizations and public agencies that use the Self-Sufficiency Standard for counseling and education:

**Women’s Initiative for Self-Employment** in San Francisco uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard with their clients who are learning to start micro-businesses. The organization uses the Standard as a reference for their clients as they begin to do financial planning for themselves and their families.

**Santa Clara County CalWORKs** uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a teaching tool for clients, contractors and staff. The agency uses the Standard:

- at the assessment stage, encouraging employed clients to look at career ladders and use the Standard as a salary goal.
- in tandem with vocational testing to help clients identify career areas that are both matched to the client’s skill level and his/her family income requirements.
- in their housing program, all members of the client’s family are aware of the family’s self-sufficiency goal, and are encouraged to contribute to that goal.
- by providing the Standard to all staff, contractors and the local workforce board, encouraging them to use it.



**The Housing Authority of the City of Napa** also includes the Self-Sufficiency Standard as part of their clients' "Self-Sufficiency Plans." The intake form for the county has a space for the client's expenses and compares those expenses to the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Napa County. The Housing Authority also uses the Standard to help clients identify areas of their family budgets where they could cut back, and to develop goals to meet their budget.

**Oakland Army Base Workforce Development Collaborative** uses the Standard in their job training classes to draw students' attention to how much basic items cost, and to inspire students to work towards a long-term goal through job training and education. Counselors describe the Standard as a part of an "intervention" so that students can make the right decisions, and learn how to budget their money. They use the Standard to help students identify areas in which they could cut costs in their daily lives. According to counselors there, the strength of the Standard is in its specificity, and that it puts self-sufficiency income in "black and white" which can help clients to set and keep long-term goals.

**Women in Nontraditional Employment Roles (WINTER)** in Los Angeles used the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a counseling tool to illustrate to low-income women why employment in the construction trades might better serve the income needs of their families. For example, counselors would use the Standard with wage data for various career tracks to show the long-term earning potential for each (e.g., dental hygienist vs. carpenter). This information helped clients make decisions about the career and training path they chose.

**Cuesta College CalWORKs** program in San Luis Obispo uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard with their students to inform them of the type of education they will need to get a self-sufficiency wage job. College staff uses the Standard in a classroom setting, as part of a handout in student workshops.

**Santa Cruz County Human Resources Agency/CalWORKs** program uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard in a number of ways. Copies of the Standard are distributed to all recipients when they first enroll in employment services. The Standard is used as a budget-planning tool in Job Search Workshops to help participants understand how to plan a household budget. When participants choose an occupational goal, the Standard is used to discuss potential earnings, and copies of the Self-Sufficiency Standard are available in their three Career Center Libraries.

**Women At Work** in Pasadena found the Standard to be so useful that they enlarged their county Self-Sufficiency Standard chart and put it up in the lobby for clients to see when they walk in. Staff members find that using the Self-Sufficiency Standard helps clients understand that "it's not their fault" when it's difficult to make ends meet – that part of the issue is simply that household costs are very high.

However, Women At Work counselors caution that using the Self-Sufficiency Standard with some clients can overwhelm and depress people who are already depressed about their situation. The counselors told us that they seek to find a balance with clients: encouraging them to aim high while keeping up their confidence where they are. One counselor told us she never pulls out the Self-Sufficiency Standard in the first few meetings with a client; instead she seeks to develop a relationship and begin to assess possible directions for the client. After she has identified some viable employment options and the client has defined with she wants to do, the Standard can be useful to determine which jobs to apply for, or what classes to pursue.

Women at Work also uses the Standard as part of budgeting education with clients. The counselors help clients figure out their expenses and plan financial strategies. Counselors told us that they find many of their clients have little knowledge about finances, and that educating them about banking, retirement, or keeping a check register enables women to reduce their costs more effectively.

Counselors at **Asian Perinatal Advocates (APA)** in San Francisco use the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a resource to help clients make decisions, although the staff members do not present the income numbers to clients who are in financial crisis and who might feel demoralized by the high income goals of the Standard. The counselors are wary of reinforcing failure to their clients by using a goal that is unreachable in the near future. APA's clients often have language barriers and are seeking any type of wage income they can get, so APA counselors only use the Standard to help clients make a long-term plan. Their first priority is to assist clients to meet their short-term income needs, like finding job openings, finding English classes and helping them apply for jobs or remain in training programs. One counselor told us, "The Self-Sufficiency Standard is more theoretical for clients because it's not something they can easily reach."

### *Costs Associated With Using the Standard*

This report represents the beginning of our organization's grappling with assessing the different costs associated with using the Standard. The following examples identify potential costs, but require further investigation to gain a thorough understanding of the true costs.

Most organizations surveyed indicated that there was little or no cost associated with using the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a counseling tool with clients. Incorporating the Standard into a counseling or case management program only incurred minimal costs of staff training or staff time to develop materials. One organization estimated spending \$1000 for staff time to develop curricula to introduce the concept to clients in a classroom setting.



## *Effects and Outcomes Resulting from Use of the Standard*

**LONG-TERM GOAL SETTING.** Despite the fact that the high income amounts in the Standard present the possibility of discouraging clients, some organizations surveyed looked at those high numbers from the flip side. These counselors and teachers indicated the effectiveness of the Standard as a way to emphasize the importance of long-term goal setting for low-income clients.

“[With the Standard] tenants understand the importance of earning more money. This leads to choices in education that might not have been considered prior...”  
- housing counselor

“People’s mouths drop to the floor when they see the numbers in the Standard,” said one job counselor, who uses the Standard as part of an exploratory budgeting exercise with her students. She walks students through the process of assessing how far a full-time \$13/hour paycheck will stretch, after payroll deductions and after budgeting for rent, food, etc. She told us that the Self-Sufficiency Standard makes sense to students when they can take it apart and realize why the numbers are so high.

Another important aspect of using the Standard is to combine the presentation of a self-sufficiency income level with a concrete plan to achieve it. In the program referenced above, students are not just presented with the Self-Sufficiency Standard; they are also presented with the opportunity to train for high-paying jobs in the construction industry. In this way, the Self-Sufficiency Standard’s income levels can serve as a motivating force to keep individuals in their job-training program until it has been completed.

**EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INFORMATION.** A number of respondents indicated that using the Standard allows clients to make better choices about what type of training or education they would pursue.

- One WIB Director commented, “[It is] great information to use for career counseling [and] realistic information to provide guidance regarding cost of living.”
- A former WIB staff member said that using the Self-Sufficiency Standard “created an atmosphere where people transitioning from welfare to work would advocate for themselves because they knew what they needed. It empowered women to advocate for themselves.”
- A community college CalWORKs staff person said that when they use the Self-Sufficiency Standard, “client career choices are different and more realistic.”

### *Challenges Associated with Using the Standard*

**DISCOURAGING TO CLIENTS.** A number of organizations indicated that they do not show the actual Self-Sufficiency income levels to clients because it may be discouraging to them, especially if they have multiple barriers, low skills or have been unemployed for an extended period of time.

One respondent indicated that even when clients make the connection between higher education and a higher wage, many of them cannot afford to pay for the education or take time away from a job to participate in an educational program. She notes the harsh reality in her work: “It is ...many times too much of a hardship to continue on to higher education.”

**ONLINE CALCULATOR NEEDED.** Another challenge identified by survey respondents was not having a web-based calculator to perform automatic calculations of what the family income needs are; how far away clients’ incomes are from economic self-sufficiency; and what benefits clients may be eligible for. Currently, case managers are using pencil and paper to calculate and track clients’ income gaps. An overwhelming number of respondents requested an online calculator to identify public benefits and track outcomes towards economic self-sufficiency.



# USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD AS A BENCHMARKING & EVALUATION TOOL

---

The Standard can be used as a **benchmarking and evaluation tool** in community-based organizations and foundations to track the progress of clients toward economic self-sufficiency.

## *How does the Standard compare to other benchmarks of income?*

We begin this discussion with an explanation of other commonly-used income benchmarks. Each income benchmark described below arises out of a particular historical context, and each is based on a different set of assumptions about what is a minimally adequate amount of income. Here are some highlights from comparable measures:

MEASURE	ANNUAL INCOME: 1 PARENT, 2 CHILDREN	ASSUMPTIONS & METHODOLOGY	DATA COLLECTION & UPDATES	LEVEL OF SPECIFICITY
California Self Sufficiency Standard	\$56,932 (Alameda County, infant + preschooler)	All adults are working full-time; driving to and from work (in most counties); very frugal food plan and minimal miscellaneous costs.	Uses publicly available data, updated every 3-4 years with newly-collected data on costs of food, housing, child care, health care, transportation, taxes/credits	County-by-county, 70 family types according to age of child and number of adults in household.
Federal Poverty Line	\$15,260	Implicit model of stay-at-home spouse taking care of children; includes only the cost of food times three & no other costs	Every year	One-size-fits all for entire country; only changes according to number of people in household, regardless of age. Family size does not indicate adult vs. children.
Lower Living Standard Income Level (LLSIL)	\$25,640 (metro area in Western Region) \$17,950 (70% of LLSIL, default definition for WIBs <sup>2</sup> )	Based on 1981 formula, updated for regional & family size differences, using Consumer Price Index.	Every year	Divides U.S. into four regions, subdivides into metro and non-metro areas. Family size does not indicate adult vs. children.
California Minimum Wage	\$17,105	Does not take actual household needs into account.	Not indexed to inflation. Political climate controls update.	Statewide, except in San Francisco (\$8.50 per hour)

---

<sup>2</sup> "WIB" stands for Workforce Investment Board. A full discussion about local WIBs' use of the LLSIL begins on page 21.

Organizations may use one or a combination of these benchmarks to determine client outcomes and define “success.” Some organizations have set a goal of

“We use [the Standard] to consider how best to move clients along an economic development spectrum. It helps us better understand and substantiate the ‘true’ cost of living and what it really takes to become self-sufficient and thriving.” – micro enterprise training organization

achieving client “economic self-sufficiency” or have developed “self-sufficiency plans” with

clients. Naturally, when organizations use a “self-sufficiency” concept or the Self-Sufficiency Standard itself to set long-term goals for clients, it follows that they might be interested in tracking how those clients actually fare in achieving those goals. This can be achieved in three distinct ways:

- *Tracking client income* captures only how well a client fares over time by determining the “dollar gap” between the client’s income and the Self-Sufficiency Standard. In this method, the organization keeps track of the client’s income at entry and exit, and compares it to the Self-Sufficiency Standard for that client’s family type and county. For example, if a client needs to earn \$11 an hour to be self-sufficient (according to the Self-Sufficiency Standard) but is earning \$9 at the point of exit, this method will only reveal how much of a “dollar gap” the services have been able to fill, and how far the client may still be away from self-sufficiency. Tracking client income does not necessarily require an extended period of time, but is simply a comparison between current wage and self-sufficiency wage.
- *Benchmarking client progress* requires two additional steps. By definition, benchmarking involves a starting point, which should be expressed as a percentage (e.g., client’s starting income is X% of the Self-Sufficiency Standard). Benchmarking calculates the client’s income against the Self-Sufficiency Standard at the point of entry, and measures the percentage the client is away from self-sufficiency (e.g., client’s income is \$10,000, and her Self-Sufficiency Standard is \$30,000 – she is earning thirty-three percent of her Self-Sufficiency Standard). Using a percentage allows public agencies and/or organizations to standardize outcomes across clients and across time (e.g., the targeted outcome is to close all clients’ income gap by ten percent, regardless of the income level they started with).

Additionally, benchmarking using a percentage allows organizations to compare current client income not only to the *Self-Sufficiency Standard*, but also to *current client expenses* (see United Way of the Bay Area example below). With both benchmarking and tracking, the Self-Sufficiency Standard can be incorporated into client counseling, where counselors show the Standard to clients and also show the client their progress toward that goal.



- *Outcome evaluation* involves using the Standard to determine a program's effectiveness in meeting its goals. The two previous methods can be used as part of an evaluation, or an evaluator can reconstruct them from existing client data. Evaluating only the number of clients who were recruited, served, completed training, placed, retained or had an increase in income does not alone reveal whether clients are reaching economic self-sufficiency. The importance of using a Self-Sufficiency Standard (and a self-sufficiency calculator that includes benefit eligibility information) is this: even if a client's income increases, a self-sufficiency measure is needed to determine if that increase is enough to cover out-of-pocket expenses. For example, if a client increases her income, that may be considered a "success" under traditional evaluations. However, if that income increase makes her ineligible for child care benefits, but she still cannot afford to pay for the child care herself, the client is not reaching economic self-sufficiency.

Here are some examples of organizations that have utilized the Standard in these three ways:

**INCOME TRACKING. Oakland Army Base Workforce Development Collaborative** and the **Housing Authority of the City of Napa** use the Self-Sufficiency Standard as part of their intake process, and include questions about income, expenses and the Self-Sufficiency Standard on their intake forms. By asking clients to lay out their income and expenses and compare it to the Self-Sufficiency Standard, they are able to pinpoint where clients begin the process, and can track their progress over time. Additionally, this information helps counselors in each agency determine the salary range that clients should aim for in their job search or career path, and helps to create a realistic "self-sufficiency plan." **ACCION San Diego** reports that they constantly track the income levels of their clients, and the Self-Sufficiency Standard is a useful tool in evaluating family income. **Jefferson Economic Development Institute** in Mount Shasta states that they are also beginning to track their clients using the Standard.

**BENCHMARKING CLIENT PROGRESS. United Way of the Bay Area** selected the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a centerpiece of their Economic Self-Sufficiency issue area. In 2002, the United Way embarked on a project to move 100 families in three counties (San Francisco, Contra Costa and Marin) towards economic self-sufficiency by funding five organizations to achieve this targeted goal, and utilized the Self-Sufficiency Standard to measure the families' progress towards that goal.

A data intake form was developed to keep track of the families' progress. United Way's grantees in the 3 counties were asked to record a *baseline income level* for their clients and then a *six-month follow-up income level* using two different income indicators.

The first indicator is “wage adequacy,” used to reveal a client’s distance from true economic self-sufficiency. Wage adequacy is defined as the percentage of a family’s total monthly gross household income (excluding subsidies and taxes) relative to the California Self-Sufficiency Standard for that family type. For example, if a client came in with a monthly income of \$300 and her Self-Sufficiency Standard was \$1200, her wage adequacy would be twenty-five percent.

The second indicator, “family income adequacy” (FIA), was used to reveal *current* financial hardship. FIA compares the family’s total monthly gross income (excluding subsidies and taxes) to the *current total monthly household expenses*. Rather than comparing to the Standard, FIA compares current income to current expenses to identify short-term income gaps. For example, a client with a monthly income of \$300 whose monthly expenses were also \$300 would have a FIA of 100%. However, even though this client may be able to pay her bills, her quality and stability of life may be undesirable at that income level.

**OUTCOME EVALUATION.** **Women’s Initiative for Self-Employment** uses the Standard to measure outcomes as clients complete their micro-enterprise training program. The organization found the Standard a useful tool to answer the question of whether they were meeting their mission of assisting low- and very-low income women to reach economic self-sufficiency through self-employment. As part of their evaluation, Women’s Initiative followed 83 clients that completed businesses management and personal development training, and interviewed them at 6, 12 and 18 months after training.

The evaluation covered several indicators, including self-sufficiency, use of business skills and business growth. Women’s Initiative defined the “personal economic self-sufficiency” indicator as, “Income from the business increased the participant’s household income and moved her to economic self-sufficiency.”

Women’s Initiative used the Self-Sufficiency Standard to define the “target income” for each client. They found that almost half of the clients surveyed reached economic self-sufficiency within 18 months of completing training, when income from their business was combined with wage income from another job. Fourteen percent of clients surveyed achieved economic self-sufficiency from their business income alone.

**Women at Work** also uses the Standard in their Mature Worker program, to evaluate whether clients are getting jobs at self-sufficiency wages. The program includes computer classes and targets women who have been out of the workforce for more than ten years.



### *Costs Associated with Using the Standard*

The costs involved in using the Standard as a benchmarking tool primarily involved paying staff/consultant time to develop the evaluation tool and then implementing it at the client level. United Way estimated \$50,000 to develop their benchmarking tool and evaluate client outcomes. The costs for nonprofits to track and record client information are unknown, but would include staff time to collect and submit the data.

### *Effects and Outcomes Resulting from Use of the Standard*

#### **ABILITY TO MEASURE OUTCOMES IN RELATION TO CLIENT NEEDS.**

Using the Standard as an outcome benchmark gives meaning to an organizational goal of helping clients or students achieve economic self-sufficiency. Agencies using the Self-Sufficiency Standard to track client outcomes were able to describe their clients' progress not only in traditional terms (job placement, wage levels, training completed), but also in relation to the actual needs of their clients' families.

### *Challenges Associated with Using the Standard*

**NOT ENOUGH FAMILY TYPES.** For the organizations that use the Standard as a benchmarking tool, it is necessary to assign each client a Self-Sufficiency Standard for their family type. However, if the client's family type is not included in the 70 provided in the Standard, it is difficult to assess what their Standard should be. Additionally, many of the organizations serving immigrants encounter clients who tend to have family types that are not included in the 70 types (e.g., more than two generations living together in one household). Also, service providers working with the elderly and disabled are unable to effectively use the Standard because it does not accurately reflect the basic living costs associated with those two groups.

# USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD AS A POLICYMAKING TOOL FOR PUBLIC AGENCIES & LEGISLATIVE BODIES

---

The Standard can be used as a **policymaking tool**, in order to increase access to job training and other services to include the working poor, and those whose incomes are above the poverty level but below self-sufficiency. Because the Federal Poverty Line is so inadequate to describe basic needs of today's working families, it follows that advocates would look to public institutions to adopt a more accurate measure. While California has not yet approved a state calculation of the Standard, Connecticut and Illinois use public dollars to calculate a state-sponsored Self-Sufficiency Standard.

Even without a state-sponsored calculation of a self-sufficiency index, there are many local agencies in California that utilize the Self-Sufficiency Standard produced by NEDLC/WOW, and use the concept of economic self-sufficiency to set policy goals, eligibility levels and define target populations.

## *Local Workforce Investment Boards*

A growing number of public workforce development agencies in California have

"The Standard is a more reliable and valid measure of self-sufficiency than the minimum requirements under the Workforce Investment Act, poverty guidelines and LLSIL." - Workforce Investment Board staff

embraced the use of the Self-Sufficiency Standard. One of the state's pioneers in this area is the **Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA)**, which has been using the Self-Sufficiency Standard for several years in many different ways:

- SETA adopted income levels close to the Self-Sufficiency Standard as its **eligibility criteria** for intensive and training services, which makes those who are working at less than \$10 an hour eligible for training.
- SETA identified a **special population of the "working poor"** as a group that would receive services on a priority basis.
- SETA uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard in their **client financial assessments**. Most WIA agencies are required to determine whether clients can support themselves through training, and the Self-Sufficiency Standard is useful as part of this process.
- SETA uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard as one of the factors to **define success**. They ask, "Did the training we provided help the client get closer to self-sufficiency?" SETA looks at job retention, upgrade and career ladder movement to see if their working poor clients are moving towards economic self-sufficiency.



- One of the SETA One-Stop Centers uses self-sufficiency as criteria in selecting **on-the-job training** placements, and has been successful in maintaining an average wage of \$10/hour or more for enrolled clients.
- SETA also uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard to conduct **labor market analysis**, to determine which industries with good wages are growing in the Sacramento area. The Workforce Investment Board looks at base wages as part of their analysis to identify critical industries to target for job placements.

Under the Workforce Investment Act, local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) are required/allowed to complete a number of tasks that can incorporate the Self-Sufficiency Standard:

- Define “self-sufficiency.”
- Select an income eligibility level for people who are already employed and who are seeking job training (incumbent workers). Workers below this income level would be eligible for services.
- Select an income eligibility level for people who have lost their jobs (dislocated workers).
- Define the “low income” priority population.

**DEFINING “SELF-SUFFICIENCY”:** Many WIBs use the Self-Sufficiency Standard to define “self-sufficiency” under the Workforce Investment Act for a variety of purposes, including incumbent worker eligibility (described in more detail below). The **Santa Cruz County Workforce Investment Board** adopted the following definition of “self-sufficiency”, which closely resembles the Self-Sufficiency Standard:

The amount of income necessary to meet basic needs (including paying taxes) in the regular ‘marketplace’ without public subsidies, such as public housing, food stamps, medical, child care or private or informal subsidies, such as free babysitting by a relative or friend, food provided by churches or local food banks, or share housing. Self-sufficiency estimates the level of income necessary for a given family type – whether working or in transition to work – to be independent of welfare and/or other public and private subsidies.

To substantiate this policy with a dollar amount, the local one-stop adopted the Self-Sufficiency Standard. The **Foothill Workforce Investment Board** and **Oakland Workforce Investment Board** also adopted the Self-Sufficiency Standard as their definitions of “self-sufficiency.”

**ELIGIBILITY FOR INCUMBENT WORKER TRAINING:** Incumbent worker training is job training for people who are already working. Incumbent worker training can take the form of customized training programs that are on-the-job and paid for in part by the employer.

The **City of Long Beach Workforce Development Bureau** created a formula using the Self-Sufficiency Standard and the Lower Living Standard Income Level (LLSIL)<sup>3</sup> to determine eligibility for intensive and training services. The agency uses a blend of the data sources primarily because the Standard is not updated annually, but the LLSIL is.

**The San Francisco Workforce Investment Board** adopted the Self-Sufficiency Standard as an eligibility criterion in two creative ways. First, to avoid “creaming” (the phenomenon that higher-income/higher-functioning clients get served while lower-income clients with more barriers are ignored), the San Francisco WIB carved out 10% of Adult Workforce Investment Act dollars to be used for clients whose incomes are between 70% of the LLSIL and 75% of the Self-Sufficiency Standard – in other words, the working poor. The Board decided that funding would be available only if it was not needed for the lower-income clients.

Second, the San Francisco WIB utilized the Self-Sufficiency Standard in developing eligibility criteria for their customized training program. Customized training is a San Francisco WIB program that is occupation-specific, on-the-job training, funded in part by employers. The WIB adopted a single income eligibility level for customized training contracts. Employees whose incomes fall below this level are eligible for training. The eligibility wage they chose was taken from the Self-Sufficiency Standard, and they selected a single family type based on an analysis of the San Francisco population.

**The Workforce Investment Network of Silicon Valley** has begun to examine the question of eligibility criteria for their customized training program (i.e., the wage level under which employed workers would be eligible to participate in job training). WIB staff recommended that the Board choose a wage from the Self-Sufficiency Standard at \$24.79/hour, the 2003 Standard for a single adult and an infant.

“It was important for Private Sector Board members to understand the disconnect between the federal poverty measure and Lower Living Standard Income Level for a given region and the actual costs of living in that region...” - Workforce Investment Board staff

The staff’s reasoning for recommending a self-sufficiency wage as an eligibility criterion was based on the importance of accountability for public workforce investments. They decided

to use the Standard to distinguish between those low-wage jobs that offer little opportunity for advancement and those that may begin at low wages but offer clear pathways to high-skill, high-wage positions.

**DEFINING THE “LOW-INCOME” PRIORITY POPULATION:** Under the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA), local WIBs are required to prioritize low-income adults and those receiving public benefits to receive services before others. WIA defines “low income” to mean an individual whose income is lower than the

<sup>3</sup> See page 14 for a chart outlining the differences between the LLSIL and other income benchmarks.

poverty line or 70% of the Lower Living Standard Income Level. However, a number of WIBs in California have used the Self-Sufficiency Standard to define what “low-income” means. WIBs using the Standard to create this definition include: **Verdugo Workforce Investment Board and Sacramento Employment & Training Agency.**

**ELIGIBILITY FOR DISLOCATED WORKER TRAINING:** In their Dislocated Worker program, the **City of Long Beach Workforce Development Bureau** created an exception to their wage limitation (85% of client’s predislocation wage) if the participant has “earnings below the defined self-sufficiency level for an adult and does not have health benefits.” The **Foothill Workforce Investment Board** adopted a policy requiring the use of the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Los Angeles County to determine eligibility for both adult and dislocated worker intensive services.

### *State and Local Legislative Bodies*

The **California State Legislature** adopted a resolution in 2004 (SJR 15) that encouraged the federal government to reexamine its use of the Federal Poverty Line and instead use a self-sufficiency index similar to the Standard. The resolution was authored by Senator Richard Alarcón, and sponsored by the National Economic Development & Law Center.

In 2000, the **California Department of Social Services** released an All County Information Notice (No. I-123-00) about the Self-Sufficiency Standard. The notice went to all county welfare offices along with a copy of the 2000 California Standard, and at least one county welfare office reported that this notice was how they heard about the Standard.

In 1997 the **Sonoma County Board of Supervisors** adopted a plan to implement welfare reform in their county. Underlying the plan were several primary goals for the new program, including the following: “Provide the assistance needed to lift families and individuals out of poverty and into self-sufficiency.” The CalWORKs department in Sonoma County responded to this mandate in a number of ways, including using a numerical goal of self-sufficiency with clients that is equal to 200% of the Federal Poverty Line.<sup>4</sup> Caseworkers use this income level with clients when deciding their goals for a long-term employment plan.

---

<sup>4</sup> Although the Federal Poverty Line has its shortcomings, some agencies use a percentage of the FPL to approach a more realistic approximation of need that is somewhat comparable to the Self-Sufficiency Standard.

### *Costs Associated with Using the Standard*

The question of a substantial cost arose with those Workforce Investment Boards that had adopted the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a policy.

As described above, some WIBs adopted the Standard as an eligibility criterion for intensive services. By increasing allowable income levels for participants in training programs, these agencies were effectively increasing the number of people eligible for their services. The question remains as to whether this creates more competition for the same number of slots, and whether that phenomenon (although it would appear to be cost-neutral) actually affects demands on staff time. One WIB stated that there was a cost to this policy “from the standpoint that more incumbent workers are eligible for services,” but could not estimate the dollar amount. If – in addition to increasing the numbers of people eligible -- the WIB *also* increased the *number of slots available* for training, the agency would incur an additional cost because they would be providing training to more clients.

There were a few WIBs that adopted the Standard in a different way, that has potentially kept the cost of services the same, by expanding the number of people eligible but restricting the number of slots available. These WIBs used the Self-Sufficiency Standard to define one of their priority populations (“low income”). Under the federal law, “low-income” individuals and those receiving public assistance are supposed to receive priority of service when funds are limited. In the case of the Verdugo WIB, 60% of those enrolled have to be “low-income”.

It is unclear if there are other costs associated with using the Standard that may not have been mentioned by the WIBs. These may include training for eligibility staff or new requirements and eligibility levels; external communication to outreach and recruit clients meeting higher eligibility requirements; developing and issuing new request for proposal (RFP) guidelines to solicit service providers who can serve this population; and developing or modifying tracking systems to ensure higher income clients are accessing services.

### *Effects and Outcomes Resulting from Use of the Standard*

**BETTER OUTCOMES FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES.** A number of WIB respondents stated that they found the Standard to be a useful tool in making job training accessible to more people. One former WIB staff person estimated that by placing clients in higher wage jobs, her One-Stop Center was able to reduce the recidivism rate of people coming back for more services, thereby reducing cost of serving repeat clients. Another WIB indicated that it was a positive outcome to have “more eligible people” as a result of using the Standard.

### *Challenges Associated with Using the Standard*

**LACK OF ANNUAL UPDATES.** Because the Standard is not updated every year, a number of Workforce Investment Board staff members have expressed concern about using it as an eligibility criteria. When the current year's Standard is unavailable, WIBs have used alternate methods to update it, e.g., multiplying the Standard income levels by a multiplier derived from the increase in the Consumer Price Index, or reverting to the LLSIL or a multiple of it to get a number approaching the levels of the Standard.

# USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD AS A PLANNING TOOL

---

The Standard can be used as a **planning tool** for organizations to get a better sense of their clients' needs, and as a way to set goals for performance outcomes.

"It is important in my field of work to have an honest look at issues of self-sufficiency and poverty in California."  
– community worker

Some organizations have chosen to incorporate the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a part of their long-term planning and institutional structure. These organizations use the Standard to help define the types of

clients they serve and how they serve those clients, because these agencies adhere to the idea that traditional descriptions of poverty omit an entire group of families struggling to make ends meet. This use of the Standard takes shape in a number of ways, including:

- Adopting economic self-sufficiency as an overarching philosophy of the organization, and incorporating it into organizational goals.
- Using the Standard as a way to better understand client and family needs, and incorporating those needs into program planning.

**Jewish Vocational Services** in San Francisco adopted self-sufficiency as a primary focus of their entire organization, in their recently completed strategic plan. The organization will be measuring their clients' progress towards self-sufficiency by examining placement wages of their clients as a percentage of the Self-Sufficiency Standard, and comparing them to wages prior to clients' entering the program.

**Blue Cross of California State Sponsored Programs** uses the Standard for their Group Needs Assessment, to better understand the needs and challenges of the clients they serve through the Medi-Cal and Healthy Families programs in San Francisco. By using the Self-Sufficiency Standard in an analysis of the incomes and work hours of their members, Blue Cross can advocate for incentives for providers to have more accommodating office hours or for more accessible school-based asthma education.

"...it became obvious that there is a real disparity between the Federal Poverty Level and the cost of living in [our] county, and that this disparity interfered with a realistic understanding of member's needs and lives." -- medical provider



Various **Girls Inc.** affiliates in California have used the Self-Sufficiency Standard to determine scholarship level and fee scales for their programs.

The **Santa Clara County Social Services Agency** uses the Standard to establish priorities in employment services contracts and to identify current and emerging issues for CalWORKs clients.

**United Way of the Bay Area** uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a funding criteria for its grantees, and the **National Economic Development and Law Center** uses the Standard as a criteria for selecting low-income board members.

The **Sierra Economic Development District** uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a resource in their 5-year plan, called the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

The **Starting Points Initiative** used the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a resource in the **San Francisco Citywide Strategic Plan for Supporting Families**, which addresses gaps in family support service needs.

#### *Effects and Outcomes Resulting from Use of the Standard*

**REALIGN PROGRAM PLANNING TO MEET NEEDS OF CLIENTS.** One respondent said that the Standard has caused their community-based organization to re-examine their perceptions about who is in poverty in their area. The Standard allows organizations to compare wages of their clients to the Standard, in order to effectively predict what is a realistic expectation for clients and in order to plan programs to meet those abilities.

“We believe that [the Self-Sufficiency Standard] is a sophisticated yet realistic instrument.”  
- county welfare department

#### *Challenges Associated with Using the Standard*

**THE FEDERAL POVERTY LINE.** One respondent identified some defensiveness in bringing the Self-Sufficiency Standard into a public agency where the Federal Poverty Line is the established eligibility standard. However, she urged that the Standard was important to raise awareness of the vast difference between the FPL and the actual amount needed to live, especially for program strategy and design.

# USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD AS A PERSUASIVE TOOL

---

“[The Standard] is so much higher than the poverty level -- it shows how much it really costs to live in the Bay Area.”  
– youth advocate

The Self-Sufficiency Standard has an immense capacity and history as a tool for advocacy, to create policy change that recognizes the needs of low-wage working families. The Standard can be used as a **persuasive tool**, to “make the case” for supporting programs and policies. The Standard has been used as a persuasive tool in a number of ways, including:

- Advocating for state and local policy that is more responsive to the needs of working families living in high-cost areas.
- Using the Standard to illustrate a demonstrated need in a local community as part of a fundraising and/or grant writing effort.
- Using the Standard for educating the general public about a particular group whose incomes are too low to pay for basic needs, or education about an effective policy strategy that can help families move towards economic independence.
- Worker advocacy, including using the Standard as a persuasive tool in living wage and minimum wage campaigns, as well as a bargaining and organizing tool.

**STATE & LOCAL POLICY.** **Childcare advocates** have used the Self-Sufficiency Standard to argue for more generous childcare subsidies in high-cost areas like San Francisco. The Standard has been cited in advocate position papers in response to Governor Schwarzenegger’s budget cuts to child care benefits for parents exiting welfare. Child advocates are also using the Standard as a resource in developing strategies to target low-income families’ participation in universal preschool initiatives.

**GRANTWRITING.** **Catholic Charities San Bernardino/Riverside and ACCION San Diego** use the Self-Sufficiency Standard when writing proposals for funding to illustrate the need for their services. The geographic specificity of the Standard allows Catholic Charities to “paint a more realistic picture of the struggle for self-sufficiency and the issues affecting low-income, poor families in our area.” Most of ACCION San Diego’s client incomes fall between the poverty line and the Self-Sufficiency Standard. They find that the Standard is “very useful...to highlight the contrast between the federal poverty level and what California families actually need to get by....it is helpful to be able to illustrate the challenges faced by low-to-moderate income populations with a numeric indicator.”



**PUBLIC EDUCATION. Honoring Emancipated Youth (HEY)** in San Francisco, a project of the United Way of the Bay Area, uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard in its marketing materials to illustrate the dire financial situation in which many foster youth find themselves. HEY uses the Standard to highlight the vast difference between the amount of income required to live in the Bay Area compared to the extremely low income levels of youth emancipating out of the foster care system. The Standard allows HEY to make the case for the importance of access to higher education, asset building and affordable supportive housing for foster youth. HEY also uses the Standard in funding proposals and when speaking on behalf of United Way during their fundraising campaigns.

The **California Department of Education** recently produced a brochure called *Girls and Women Today*, which included the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a way to illustrate the fact that higher incomes are needed for families to make ends meet.

Leaders in the field of **nontraditional employment for women** (e.g., construction, law enforcement, etc) use the Self-Sufficiency Standard to illustrate the difference between wages of jobs that are typically filled by women and the higher-paying nontraditional jobs for which few women are prepared.

The **Community Action Partnership of Orange County** uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard in presentations to city council members to draw attention to the working poor, and to help partner organizations build a case for funding.

**WORKER ADVOCACY.** Labor groups have used the Self-Sufficiency Standard to argue for **higher wage policies**, including living wage policies that apply to employment and contracting and minimum wage policies at the local and state level.

- The **San Francisco Living Wage Coalition** used the Standard to illustrate how much it cost to live in San Francisco, to justify the need for a living wage.
- The Standard has been a part of the recent statewide battle to **increase the minimum wage**, and was highlighted in testimony to the California Industrial Welfare Commission during its deliberations.
- The **Northern California Carpenters Regional Council in Sonoma County** used the Self-Sufficiency Standard to advocate around prevailing wage laws.
- The **Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) Local 11** in Los Angeles uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard in public relations efforts to highlight the fact that their workers have wages too low to make ends meet.

*Challenges Associated with Using the Standard*

**MORE INFO, LESS PAPER.** One respondent identified the need to have more background information available on data sources used to create the Self-Sufficiency Standard. Additionally, he felt that each county table should be condensed into a shorter document so that it is easier to handle.



# USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD AS A DATA TOOL

---

The Standard can be used as a **data tool**, because it describes in detail the actual needs of working families county-by-county and family-by-family. Numerous researchers have turned to the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a data

“...we wanted to go beyond the Federal Poverty Line.” – researcher

resource for research on economic development, workforce development, worker wages, and other areas. One researcher told us he decided to use the

Standard in his analysis of income inequality as a way to show the inadequacies of the federal poverty line as a measure of need, as well as the inadequacies of the consumer price index as a measure of the increase in the cost of living for low-income families.

NEDLC found that research utilizing the Self-Sufficiency Standard generally answers one or more of the following questions:

- ***How much does it cost to live in a particular area?***
  - ✓ *The California Child Care Portfolio* by the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network ([www.rrnetwork.org](http://www.rrnetwork.org))
  - ✓ The Employment Development Department in upstate counties uses the Standard as part of its information dissemination and in presentations to reflect county-by-county comparisons.
- ***How many people are living below an income adequate level (in a certain county, region, job classification, ethnic group, gender, etc)?***
  - ✓ *Overlooked & Undercounted: A New Perspective on the Struggle to Make Ends Meet in California* ([www.nedlc.org](http://www.nedlc.org))
  - ✓ *In the Shadow of Prosperity: Crafting a New Policy Agenda for Bay Area Working Poor Families* (Executive Summary at [www.nedlc.org](http://www.nedlc.org))
  - ✓ *The Bottom Line: Setting the Real Standard for Bay Area Working Families* ([www.nedlc.org](http://www.nedlc.org) and [www.uwba.org](http://www.uwba.org))
  - ✓ *State of the Bay Area: A Regional Report* ([www.ncccsf.org](http://www.ncccsf.org))
  - ✓ *Bay Area Indicators: Measuring Progress Toward Sustainability (Bay Area Council)*
  - ✓ New Economy/Working Solutions research on economic development in income inequality in Marin, Sonoma, Napa and Mendocino counties (forthcoming)

- **How well are public benefits actually meeting the needs of families?**
  - ✓ *Understanding the Recession's Effect on Women: Tools for Empowerment* ([www.workingpartnershipsusa.org](http://www.workingpartnershipsusa.org))
- **How adequate are the average wages for particular industries (including those industries that are usually occupied by people of color and women)?**
  - ✓ *Working in the Shadow of Prosperity: An Economic Portrait of Hotel and Restaurant Workers in the Los Angeles County Tourism Industry* ([www.nedlc.org](http://www.nedlc.org))
  - ✓ *Failing to Make Ends Meet: A Report on the Economic Status of Women in California* ([www.womensfoundca.org](http://www.womensfoundca.org))

### *Challenges Associated with Using the Standard*

**TOO MANY FAMILY TYPES.** For researchers who need a single income against which to compare census data, wage data, etc, the Self-Sufficiency Standard is a bit cumbersome because of its many family types. Some researchers have solved this problem by choosing a family type based on a logical criteria, such as the most common family type in a given group or geographic region.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

---

The following recommendations emerged from our research. NEDLC will use these recommendations in our planning and work with the Self-Sufficiency Standard around the state, and we look forward to collaborating with more organizations to generate more widespread use of the Standard.

- 1. Online self-sufficiency calculator.** Survey respondents overwhelmingly stated that they would like to have an online self-sufficiency calculator that identifies public benefits that might bring clients closer to self-sufficiency, which can be a valuable case management tool for counselors.
- 2. Assistance for researchers using the Standard.** A short piece is needed on how different researchers have dealt with the various family types in the Standard, why, and what to think about and/or to publish weighted averages for different family sizes.
- 3. Update the Standard more frequently.** WIBs who have adopted the Standard have had to update it using the Consumer Price Index or revert to another measure when the current Standard is not available.
- 4. More consistent and regular dissemination of the Standard when it is updated.** The Self-Sufficiency Standard should be disseminated widely when it is updated.
- 5. Online Self-Sufficiency Standard.** Put the Standard in Excel format online in a fully accessible archive for research needs. Provide access to more family types than 70 in an online format.
- 6. Examine whether clients find the Self-Sufficiency Standard useful.** Get an assessment from clients on whether they think the Standard is realistic and/or helpful.
- 7. Keeping staff informed of rule changes.** If workforce development agencies (public or private) use the Standard to increase eligibility for services, they must factor in a communication and training strategy to keep front-line staff informed of the changes, to avoid unintended denial of benefits to eligible clients.
- 8. Using the Standard as a benchmarking tool requires clear goals.** Because survey respondents identified so many different ways to use the Standard for benchmarking and evaluation, it is important that public and nonprofit agencies using the Standard need to be clear on what they are measuring (e.g., movement towards economic self-sufficiency), before developing a data tracking system or establishing performance goals.

***To obtain a copy of the 2003 Self-Sufficiency Standard for your county:***

[www.nedlc.org/cfess/cfess\\_registration.htm](http://www.nedlc.org/cfess/cfess_registration.htm)

***To find out more about the Self-Sufficiency Standard:***

To learn more about using the California Self-Sufficiency Standard in your organization or agency, contact Aimee Durfee, Coordinator of Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency at the National Economic Development & Law Center: 510-251-2600 ext. 127 or [cfess@nedlc.org](mailto:cfess@nedlc.org).

If you have technical questions about data sources or how the Standard is calculated, please contact the Center for Women's Welfare at 206/685-5264, or [pearce@u.washington.edu](mailto:pearce@u.washington.edu).

If you want to learn more about the uses of the Self-Sufficiency Standard nationally, contact Wider Opportunities for Women at 202-464-1596 or email [mgolga@wowonline.org](mailto:mgolga@wowonline.org).

