

CALWORKS VAR MANUAL

The purpose of this manual is to provide a very short summary of the project, answer basic questions, and provide program-specific information. It should be used in conjunction with the General VAR User Manual.

Brief Background of Vision-Aligned Reporting

In spring 2020, the Chancellor's Office convened a cross-functional internal working group to design and pilot a new, comprehensive program reporting structure and process that would:

- Maximize colleges' time and resources;
- Enable institutions to evaluate, learn and evolve to better support student success;
- Make it easier for decision-makers to interpret and act on data from our institutions; and
- Activate Vision for Success core commitments and achieve the new Vision 2030 goals.

The resulting Vision-Aligned Reporting structure was borne out of a three-year development, planning, piloting, and refinement effort to create a reporting process that focuses on collecting information that offers direct visibility into how programs' efforts impact student outcomes. Vision-Aligned Reporting will be implemented statewide for 11 programs beginning in fall 2024.

Additional information about the development and implementation of this process can be found on the [Chancellor's Office VAR website](#).

How/why was CalWORKs chosen to report via VAR?

The VAR was piloted between 2020-2021 and 2022-2023 and 15 college program reports were chosen to test and refine the new process. After receiving feedback from pilot colleges, 11 programs were deemed appropriate for the first year of statewide scaling based on potential impact and the ease of integration into VAR. CalWORKs is one of those 11 programs.

Next, the project team met with Chancellor's Office CalWORKs staff to (1) review current reporting requirements and align them with VAR via an activity crosswalk (see Table 1) and (2) ensure that data provided via VAR would meet the program's needs for statewide reporting as well as provide information that is necessary to design and deliver statewide support and technical assistance. Feedback from those meetings was incorporated into this manual.

Besides using the new tool, what else is changing related to CalWORKs reporting?

Policy Changes

After careful review, it has been determined that no changes to statute or regulation are needed to align CalWORKs reporting with VAR.

Starting with reporting for the 2024-2025 academic year, the VAR report will be due December 15 for the previous reporting year. For example, the completed report including college-level narratives will be submitted on December 15, 2025 for the 2024-2025 reporting year.

VAR is replacing the CalWORKs Program Plan which is no longer required per revisions to the interagency agreement with CDSS.

MIS Data Changes for the 2025-2026 Reporting Year

The CalWORKs data submission to MIS will be updated to align data elements with the requirements of the new reporting process. As part of this alignment process, four data elements will be deleted from the current MIS table and the VAR elements will be added. A crosswalk between the deleted elements and the proposed new elements is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Changes to CalWORKs MIS Data Elements

Deleted CalWORKs Element	New VAR Element (Element IDs to be determined by COMIS Unit)	Explanation
SC03	COUNSELING-ACADEMIC	More detailed counseling categories now required.
	COUNSELING-BASIC-NEEDS	
	COUNSELING-MENTAL-HEALTH	
	COUNSELING-CAREER	
	COUNSELING-FINANCIAL AID	
	COUNSELING-PROGRAM-SPECIFIC	
	COUNSELING-OTHER	
SC05	DIRECT-AID-TEXTBOOKS	More detailed direct aid to students categories required.
	DIRECT-AID-TRANSPORTATION	
	DIRECT-AID-ACADEMIC-SUPPLIES	
	DIRECT-AID-OTHER	
	SERVICES-TUTORING	
SC06/SC07	DIRECT-AID-CHILDCARE-HOURS [On-campus]	Values included in new VAR direct aid to students category.
	DIRECT-AID-CHILDCARE-HOURS [Off-campus]	Campus staff will need to separate out on-campus from off-campus via specification text (see brackets).

Collecting and submitting data via the new MIS format for CalWORKs will be required during the 2025-2026 academic year. **Additional information on this process will be provided by the Chancellor's Office in late spring 2024 and colleges will have 15 months to prepare for the MIS changes.** Any MIS

submissions required during the 2024-2025 academic year will continue to be via the existing structure and process.

Continue Providing Fiscal Data in SSARCC

Because the CalWORKs program is funded from multiple sources, it is important for staff to continue reporting expenditure information via SSARCC according to the existing schedule.

Engagement in Cross-Functional Conversations

The new reporting process has two levels of reporting. The first is a program-level reporting component during which programs report data on activities conducted during the academic year. The second is the college-level component. The college-level reporting requires that all program information be reviewed and analyzed by a cross-functional team for the purpose of answering a set of Vision goal specific narrative questions. Those questions are:

- Provide 3 specific highlights in which specific disproportionately impacted groups were served with the goal of closing equity gaps.
- Aligning and organizing the efforts of multiple programs to support shared goals will create larger impact. Name 3 concrete steps the college has taken to braid the efforts/funds of programs to increase impact.
- List the 3 most effective strategies or tactics used to achieve this goal.
- Identify 3 important barriers the college faced in trying to achieve this goal.
- Identify the top three changes your college **will** make to achieve this Vision goal.

CalWORKs staff should ensure they are participating in these cross-functional conversations so that their insight, priorities, and program activities are appropriately represented in Vision goal narratives.

Categories/subcategories specific to CalWORKs reporting

To complete the VAR report, each activity undertaken by the CalWORKs program must be reported under a category and subcategory. There are six main categories to choose from and each has its own set of subcategories (see the appendix in the General VAR User Manual).

Given the number of category/subcategory combinations, the Chancellor's Office is providing program-specific crosswalks to identify the most common activities included in past reporting and specify the appropriate category and subcategory for each. The crosswalk for CalWORKs reporting can be found in Table 1 above. However, ***there are many new activity categories and subcategories that must also be reported if conducted by the CalWORKs program, so staff should review those new categories and subcategories to ensure they are reported, if necessary.***

Where to get additional information

Moving forward, college program staff with questions about completing CalWORKs reporting through the VAR have a variety of resources to support them. First, each college CEO has identified an implementation lead for their campus that can be a first source of information. Those implementation leads received training on the new process during fall 2023. Second, implementation leads will provide training for affected college program staff in spring 2024, with support from the VAR project team. Third, your regular Chancellor's Office CalWORKs contacts are always available to assist. See Table 2 for that contact information.

Table 2: CalWORKs Chancellor’s Office Contacts

Name	Campus or CO Role	Contact Information
Nicole Alexander	CalWORKs Specialist	Nalexander@cccco.edu
Campus Implementation Lead	Varies	Email VARSupport@foundationccc.org to request the name and contact information for your campus.
VAR Project Team	Project directors	VARSupport@foundationccc.org

Finally, throughout 2023-2024 there are a variety of electronic and other resources made available to campus program staff including those in Table 3.

Table 3: VAR Resources for CalWORKs Program Staff

Tool	Information Provided	Date Available
VAR module on the VRC (You must be logged into the VRC first for the link to function)	A general overview of goals, background, structure, and implementation steps for the new process	Now
General VAR User Manual	Detailed explanation of how to accurately complete the reporting requirements using the online reporting tool	Link will be available on the Chancellor’s Office VAR website soon
CalWORKs VAR Manual	Short brief covering specific changes to your program’s specific reporting process and activity crosswalk to support accurate reporting	Link will be available on the Chancellor’s Office VAR website soon
User Helpdesk	Responses to specific questions either through a self-help process or by contacting project team staff	Summer 2024