

# HOW IS THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD USED?

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is currently being used to better understand issues of income adequacy, to create and analyze policy, and to help individuals striving to meet their basic needs. Community organizations, academic researchers, policy institutes, legal advocates, training providers, community action agencies, and state and local officials, among others are using the Standard. Below are some examples of ways that the Standard is being used.

## SOUTHERN STATES

- In Virginia, Voices for Virginia's Children successfully advocated for the state's TANF Authorization Committee to use the Virginia Self-Sufficiency Standard as a tool for setting eligibility guidelines.
- The Women's Fund of Mississippi revamped their grant-making and advocacy work to focus on the overall goal of economic self-sufficiency for women, using the Self-Sufficiency Standard as the underlying blueprint for these changes.
- The Delaware Economic Development Office has used the Delaware Self-Sufficiency Standard to evaluate strategic fund grant applications in order to focus its resources on quality employment growth.
- The Human Services Coalition of Dade County (now Catalyst Miami) in Florida issued a policy brief, which used the Standard to examine Florida's human services sector from an economic and community perspective.

## POLICY ANALYSIS

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is used as a tool to analyze the impact of current and proposed policy changes. The Standard can be used to evaluate the impact of a variety of work supports (such as SNAP/Food Stamp Program or Medicaid) or policy options (such as changes in child care co-payments, tax reform, or tax credits) on family budgets.

- In Colorado, the Colorado Center on Law and Policy used the Colorado Self-Sufficiency Standard to determine the impact of affordable housing on family stability and upward mobility. In addition, the Colorado Division of Housing used information from the Colorado Self-Sufficiency Standard in its report *Housing Colorado: The Challenge for a Growing State*.
- In Pennsylvania, many groups, including PathWays PA, have used the Standard to model the impact of a state Earned Income Tax Credit on the ability of a family to

reach self-sufficient wages. Pennsylvania also used the Standard for an analysis of the impact of proposed child care co-payments on low-income working parents. This analysis was instrumental in preventing the proposed co-payments.

## COUNSELING TOOL

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is used as a counseling tool to help participants in work and training programs access benefits and develop strategies to become self-sufficient. Counseling tools allow users to evaluate possible wages, then compare information on available programs and work supports to their own costs and needs. Clients are empowered with information that allows them to develop and test out their own strategies for achieving self-sufficient incomes.

- In Washington State, the online Self-Sufficiency Calculator is used by workforce councils across the state as a counseling tool; it is also publically accessible at [www.thecalculator.org](http://www.thecalculator.org).
- Counselors in a variety of agencies such as homeless shelters, transitional housing, and substance abuse counseling centers, have used the Standard-based Snohomish Self-Sufficiency Matrix, or adaptations of this tool. It includes 25 dimensions that measure client progress from "striving/in crisis" to "thriving", and is available at [www.snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7130](http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7130).
- PathWays PA offers The *Pennsylvania Online Training and Benefits Eligibility Tool*, an interactive career-counseling tool based on the 2012 Pennsylvania Self-Sufficiency Standard. The online counseling tool can be used by counselors and clients to test the ability of various wages to meet a family's self-sufficiency needs, as well as what training programs they might be eligible for at their current wage. This tool also allows clients to apply for benefits immediately or for counselors to do so on a client's behalf.

## EVALUATION TOOL

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is used to evaluate outcomes for grantees of economic development and foundation proposals. Such evaluations can help redirect resources to approaches that result in improved outcomes for participants and more efficient use of limited foundation and government funding.

- The United Way of the Bay Area and Y&H Soda Foundation are evaluating the success of their grantees by how effectively they are able to move families toward self-sufficiency, as defined by the Self-Sufficiency Standard. These foundations understand that to be effective, job training and direct service programs need to know the actual costs that clients are facing, information that is provided by the Standard.
- The San Diego Women's Foundation focused their 2013-2014 grant cycle on proposals that would help families move to self-sufficiency. They defined their target population as families with incomes higher than the Federal Poverty Level but lower than the Self-Sufficiency Standard for San Diego.

## TARGETED ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

The Self-Sufficiency Standard has been used to target job training resources on education/training that leads to self-sufficiency waged jobs. Using a targeted jobs strategy, the Standard helps to match job seekers with employment that pays Self-Sufficiency Wages. Through analysis it is possible to determine the jobs and sectors on which to target training and education resources, including training for occupations that are nontraditional for women and people of color.

- In Connecticut, the Self-Sufficiency Standard has been adopted at the state level since 1998. It has been used in planning state-supported job training, placement and employment retention programs, and has been distributed to all state agencies that counsel individuals seeking education, training, or employment. Connecticut's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women regularly uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard in legislative testimony.
- In California's Santa Clara County, the Self-Sufficiency Standard was used in a sectoral employment intervention analysis that focused on the availability of nontraditional jobs, the geographical spread of those jobs, the availability of training resources, and wage rates. The analysis led to a curriculum and counselor training package that targeted transportation jobs and provided \$140,000 to the community college system to explore how to strengthen preparation for these jobs.

## POVERTY AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY RESEARCH

Because the Standard provides an accurate and specific measure of income adequacy, it is frequently used in research. The Standard provides a means of estimating how poverty differs from place to place and among different family types. The Standard provides a means to measure the adequacy of various work supports, such as child support or child care assistance, given a family's income, place of residence, and composition.

- Rise Together Bay Area and Insight Center for Community Economic Development's report *Promoting Family Economic Security in the San Francisco Bay Area Region* included the Standard as a key benchmark in its economic models.
- In several states, the Self-Sufficiency Standard has been used along with data from the U.S. Census Bureau to measure the number of families above and below the Standard, as well as by characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, family type, education, occupation, and employment. These demographic reports have been published by the Center for Women's Welfare for eight states, and the most recent of these reports demonstrates the impact of the Great Recession as measured by the Standard.

## COMMUNITY INDICATOR

Community indicators and scorecards help communities to examine the well-being of residents. The Self-Sufficiency Standard provides communities with an indicator of the cost of living at a basic needs level and, in some communities, we have measured how many households are living below the Standard. These are also excellent educational tools for the public and government officials.

- The Dave and Lucille Packard Foundation includes the Self-Sufficiency Standard in Kidsdata.org, a database tool providing access to information about the health and well-being of children across California.
- The increase or decrease in the number of families living below the Self-Sufficiency Standard is included as an indicator of economic well-being in the Erie Vital Signs Dashboard.

## THE STANDARD IN PRACTICE

For more descriptions of the ways organizations apply the Self-Sufficiency Standard in their work and links to examples, please visit [www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/standard-practice](http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/standard-practice).