



Instructions for the PCSAO Workload and Caseload Analysis Calculator

Introduction

The PCSAO Workload and Caseload Analysis Calculator is the result of three years of research by Public Children Services Association of Ohio. Information and background research can be found at <http://www.pcsao.org/resources/other>. The calculator is a simple and straightforward Excel spreadsheet with three tabs: Available Hours, Workload Impact and Efficiency, and Caseload and Workload Calculation. Each tab is protected, or locked, except for the fields that require you to enter data. You are welcome to unprotect the sheets if you wish to take a look “under the hood”; there is no password.

PCSAO’s calculator is analogous to a mortgage calculator that you might use when looking at options to buy a home. Variables in a mortgage calculator such as down payment, interest rate, loan amount, and term can be adjusted, and each adjustment affects – at least slightly – “the bottom line.” The workload calculator is simply a tool for agencies, a lens through which to view agency variables and consider minor changes that may affect “the bottom line” – in this case, the amount of time a caseworker has to spend on a case that is not high demand in any given month. (See below for a more complete explanation of what PCSAO considers “the bottom line” to be.)

The first decision you must make is how many “views” of your agency you plan to examine using the calculator. The view could be agency wide, or it could be all traditional response units, or all alternative response units, or a single unit. Columns are already provided for intake vs. ongoing data. You may want to save each view separately. A notes section is provided on each tab to document the data used to arrive at the figures provided.

This calculator has not yet been tested in an agency using the single-worker model, or “one worker, one family.” PCSAO recommends that agencies using this model complete the calculator using all FTE caseworkers and all cases (intake and ongoing) in one column only, i.e., in the intake or the ongoing column, but not in both.

Worksheet #1: Available Hours

Header Fields

Enter the name of your agency; the name will carry through to the other two worksheets. If using a “view” of a single unit or group of units, feel free to indicate that in the name. If analyzing workload by TR or AR units, check the appropriate box. Note that this will have no bearing on the calculator and is merely for tracking purposes.

Line 1

Enter number of FTE caseworkers assigned to manage the workload, separated by intake and ongoing. Consider the following:

- Reduce FTE time by the appropriate fraction if your investigators also act as screeners. Example: If you have three full-time investigators but they each spend about one-quarter of their time screening calls, reduce the total FTE time by one-quarter.
- Reduce FTE time for new caseworkers if they do not yet carry a full caseload.
- If your agency experiences a number of vacancies, or if you have long-term funded but unfilled positions, you may consider using one “view” that reflects a fully staffed scenario and a different view to reflect a more realistic FTE scenario.
- Add FTE time if a supervisor or director carries a caseload serving as the primary worker assigned to a case.

Line 2

Enter the number of paid hours in a work week for your caseworkers. This number is typically 40 but may be less. Include time even if the worker is paid for lunch or breaks.

Line 3

The calculator calculates the total number of hours available for work annually by caseworkers, multiplying the FTEs by the number of hours worked per week.

Line 4

Enter percentage of time spent on non-casework activity as a percentage (do not enter the % sign). You should be able to identify this figure from Random Moment Sample (RMS) data. Typically, the figure is 30-35 percent, accounting for time that staff are on sick/vacation leave, in training, at lunch or on break (if paid for that time), serving on agency-wide committees, or any other time not related to casework.

Line 5

The calculator backs out this percentage to arrive at the total number of hours available for casework annually by caseworkers.

Line 6

Enter any additional hours available for casework annually. This may be difficult to calculate, and you may want to enter 0 for the initial “view.” The purpose of these fields is to capture time spent by case aides/family aides or other support staff who support children and families on the agency caseload. It is also intended to capture overtime paid to caseworkers annually to manage their caseload. The latter figure should be easier to calculate based on payroll records. Assuming that all overtime is spent directly on casework and not on other agency tasks, enter all of the overtime paid to caseworkers in the last year. Time spent by case aides and other support staff may be more challenging to ascertain, but you can use this same worksheet of the calculator to determine the number of available hours just for these staff. Remember to break these figures down according to intake and ongoing (e.g., overtime may only be available to investigators in your agency, or case aides may only work on ongoing cases, not on investigations).

Line 7

The calculator adds these hours to the total number of hours available for casework annually by all staff.

Worksheet #2: Workload Impact and Efficiency

This worksheet is independent of the other two. Responses on this worksheet will not affect figures on Worksheet #3. While the caseworker perceptions survey and the focus groups confirmed that certain agency and community factors do indeed make workload more manageable – and caseworkers more efficient – there was unfortunately no basis to determine to what extent these factors influence caseworker time. As a result, this worksheet’s purpose is to inform how the agency interprets “the bottom line” on Worksheet #3 – not to mathematically affect that bottom line.

PCSAO recommends that the agency director assemble a small committee that includes senior managers and, possibly, a supervisor and caseworker to rate the agency on each of the factors in this worksheet. (Note that some ratings may be sensitive in nature.) An outside perspective, such as that provided by the county’s Technical Assistance Specialist (TAS) is highly recommended, particularly for purposes of comparison to other counties of similar size.

The rating scale is simple, with 1 being average or slightly above/below average efficiency, 2 being superior efficiency, and 0 being inferior or poor efficiency. Most ratings will be 1; in general, only special circumstances should rate a 0 or 2. Note that for Line 3 only, an agency that requires stringent quality measures should be rated a 0 (not a 2), as this will likely inhibit efficiency (even as it may improve case outcomes).

Ratings can be applied separately to investigation vs. ongoing units if necessary. For example, one unit may have stronger supervision or less turnover than another.

Below are the factors considered in the project survey and focus groups. There may be other factors that you consider important timesavers, efficiencies, or workload impacts.

Line 1

Factors that influence agency resource level and internal supports include:

- Access to an adequate county levy or support from the county general fund;
- Access to technology (such as tablets) that improves a worker’s ability to manage cases;
- Access to a robust local foster care network;
- Access to professional supports (case aides, transportation aides, visitation supervision) that assist with caseload;
- Access to administrative supports that provide clerical or scheduling support for the caseload.

Line 2

Factors that influence external supports include:

- Access to community mental health and addiction services;
- Access to emergency food/shelter services;
- Access to other local referral services that support children and families (e.g., Children’s Advocacy Center).

Line 3

Factors that influence agency expectations and quality measures:

- Accreditation by COA;
- Membership in ProtectOhio Consortium;

- Other above-standard expectations (e.g., require two visits per month for traditional cases, use of DR practice profiles);
- Lack of QIP in most recent CPOE review.

Line 4

Factors that influence supervision:

- Tenure of supervisor;
- Completion of supervisor core;
- Completion of annual training hours;
- Use of DR practice profiles and supervisor tools;
- Tenure of caseworkers reporting to the supervisor.

Line 5

Factors that influence turnover/tenure:

- Turnover rate: below 50% or above 80%;
- Education level of caseworkers;
- Experience of caseworkers;
- Average number of caseworkers assigned to the same case over the life of that case.

Line 6

The final Impact and Efficiency “score” should be discussed among the group. While a score at or near 1 will be most common, a higher score (say, 1.4 or higher) may have a positive effect on “the bottom line” in Worksheet #3, whereas a lower score (say, .6 or lower) may have a negative effect.

Worksheet #3: Caseload and Workload Calculation

Line 1

Enter the average number of cases opened per month for investigation/assessment and the average number of active ongoing cases per month. Because both traditional and alternative response investigations/assessments are now typically open for 45 days, rather than 30, it is important that you use the total number of screened-in investigations/assessments in the last year and divide by 12 to get an accurate number. If your “view” is agency wide, enter the total number of cases; if the view is only a subsection of your agency (e.g., all TR units, or a single TR unit), enter the appropriate number of investigations for that subsection. Similarly, for ongoing, use the total number of cases that transferred to ongoing plus the total number of cases open for ongoing services (in-home, out-of-home, AR, etc.) in a year’s time and divide by 12.

The calculator does the rest!

Line 2

The calculator converts annual hours available for casework from Worksheet #1 (Line 7) into a monthly figure.

Line 3

The calculator transfers the number of FTE caseworkers from Worksheet #1 (Line 1).

Line 4

The calculator shows a simple caseload figure per FTE worker (not counting any extra time added in Worksheet #1, Line 6). If these results do not appear to be an accurate reflection of caseload sizes, consider going back to Worksheet #1 and reviewing your data.

Lines 5, 6 and 7

The calculator shows how much time on average a worker will spend on a single high-demand case in any given month, using the findings from the time study that in a dynamic system, caseworkers spend 75% of their time on 35% of their caseload.

Lines 8, 9 and 10

The calculator shows how much time on average a worker will have left to spend on a single case that is not high demand in any given month, or 25% of their time for 65% of their caseload.

Line 10: “The Bottom Line”

Line 10 is considered “the bottom line.” By expressing the average time that a caseworker has to spend on a case not in high demand, it raises a series of questions for the agency: Is that amount of time sufficient for adequately serving a family/child on the caseload? If, for example, a low-demand case would involve one one-hour visit, 30 minutes of travel time, and 30 minutes of case management in SACWIS, then two hours could be deemed sufficient; however, the research conducted for this project suggests that is low. Caseworker perceptions of time required to service a case with “low complexity” – later validated by focus groups with both caseworkers and supervisors – suggest that cases require a minimum of four hours (median of eight hours) for investigations and a minimum of three hours (median of six hours) for ongoing services. The caseworker’s efficiency and the agency’s workload impact factors (Worksheet #2) could impact your interpretation of this “bottom line” significantly. A highly efficient worker in an agency with many resources may be able to accomplish much more in two hours than a less efficient worker in an agency with few resources.

Going back to the mortgage calculator analogy, you may consider revisiting some of your responses in worksheets #1 or #2 to see how changes impact “the bottom line.” For example, if you did not originally calculate overtime or the time contributed by support staff (case aides, transportation aides, visitation supervisors, etc.), doing so may increase the final figure.

Along the same lines, if an agency wants to improve “the bottom line,” but does not have the resources to hire more caseworkers, you may consider taking steps over time to change some of the variables. For example, you may look at increasing the number of available hours for casework activity, improving the quality of supervision, or reducing turnover. If a unit-by-unit view reveals that “the bottom line” is much higher in one unit of your agency than in another, you may consider moving staff to that struggling unit.