



## Policy Brief

# Building a Volunteer Marketplace to Meet Medi-Cal Work Requirements

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*This policy project was developed by Aspen Policy Academy leaders while participating in the 2026 Tech Executive Leadership Initiative (TELI). This policy brief provides an overview of the leaders' proposed solution. The full project is [available here](#). Please note that all authors' opinions published here are their own. This publication does not reflect the views of the Aspen Policy Academy or the Aspen Institute.*

## Executive Summary

San Francisco should build SFVolunteers, a self-service volunteer marketplace that would enable Medi-Cal clients to meet new federal work requirements and report their hours automatically to the San Francisco Human Services Agency (SFHSA).

Under the federal One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA, also known as H.R.1,) passed in 2025, many Medi-Cal clients must now complete 80 hours per month of work, volunteering, or education to keep their coverage. These requirements will strain clients, overwhelm SFHSA staff with verification work, and flood San Francisco community organizations with uncoordinated volunteer requests. Without a streamlined system, eligible residents risk losing their healthcare coverage due to administrative failures.

The SFVolunteers marketplace would enable community partners to post volunteer opportunities, allow clients to sign up for opportunities and track their hours, and automatically transmit verified hours to the California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) for compliance reporting. By integrating directly with eligibility systems, the SFVolunteers platform would reduce administrative burden, prevent avoidable coverage loss, and scale without requiring significant new staff.

## Background

New federal requirements put thousands of San Franciscans at risk of losing their Medi-Cal coverage: SFHSA expects that up to 50,000 current Medi-Cal clients could lose benefits if they fail to meet the new community engagement requirements under H.R.1. Many clients will turn to volunteering to meet at least part of their requirement, including those already working part-time or in job training who still need additional hours to reach the 80-hour monthly threshold. Already understaffed case workers will face increased responsibilities, as they will need to verify compliance with the new work requirements.<sup>1</sup>

**San Francisco lacks the infrastructure to support volunteer-based compliance at this scale.** No centralized system exists to help Medi-Cal clients find qualifying volunteer opportunities and efficiently report hours. Clients seeking to meet the requirements by volunteering will need to independently search for opportunities across fragmented sources, coordinate schedules directly with organizations, and submit manual verification. Community partner sites, already operating at capacity, will not be able to meet the needs of an influx of clients. While it is difficult to predict how many Medi-Cal clients will choose volunteering to fulfill the work requirements, data from Georgia and Arkansas, where work requirements were previously implemented for Medicaid, suggest that 4% to 13% of compliant clients volunteered for at least part of their hours.

The City and County of San Francisco's current volunteer web page functions primarily as a directory of disparate city-based volunteer opportunities, making the sign-up and hour-tracking processes burdensome if Medi-Cal clients need multiple volunteer opportunities to meet the H.R. 1 requirements. Another organization, HandsOn Bay Area, offers a volunteer platform and verifies community service hours for CalFresh clients, but verification can take weeks and is not integrated with CalSAWS. Neither resource has the capacity to handle the surge in demand or provide real-time compliance reporting. Furthermore, because HandsOn Bay Area is a private nonprofit, San Francisco cannot compel it to meet government service standards, integrate with CalSAWS on the city's timeline, or prioritize Medi-Cal compliance over its mission. A compliance-critical public benefits function requires a system that the city owns and controls.

Poorly designed compliance systems can cause eligible people to lose coverage. Georgia and Arkansas encountered similar challenges in helping residents maintain enrollment. For example, in 2023, Georgia launched the Pathways to Coverage program, which requires participants to meet community engagement requirements similar to H.R. 1 to maintain their Medicaid coverage. By early 2025, only 7% of its target population had enrolled. A retrospective study found that the Georgia program was not grounded in

human-centered design, resulting in steep paperwork burdens and high denial rates. Similarly, in 2018, Arkansas implemented work requirements for Medicaid. Nearly 17,000 Medicaid clients lost coverage, 97% of whom were actually meeting the community engagement requirement but failed to navigate the reporting process.

## Recommendation

SFHSA should create SFVolunteers, a self-service volunteer marketplace on [SF.gov](#) where community partners could post volunteer opportunities and Medi-Cal clients could find, sign up for, and log hours to meet their monthly community engagement requirement—all in one place. The platform would function as a two-sided portal, allowing clients to track their progress toward the 80-hour requirement through a personal dashboard, as shown in Figure 1.

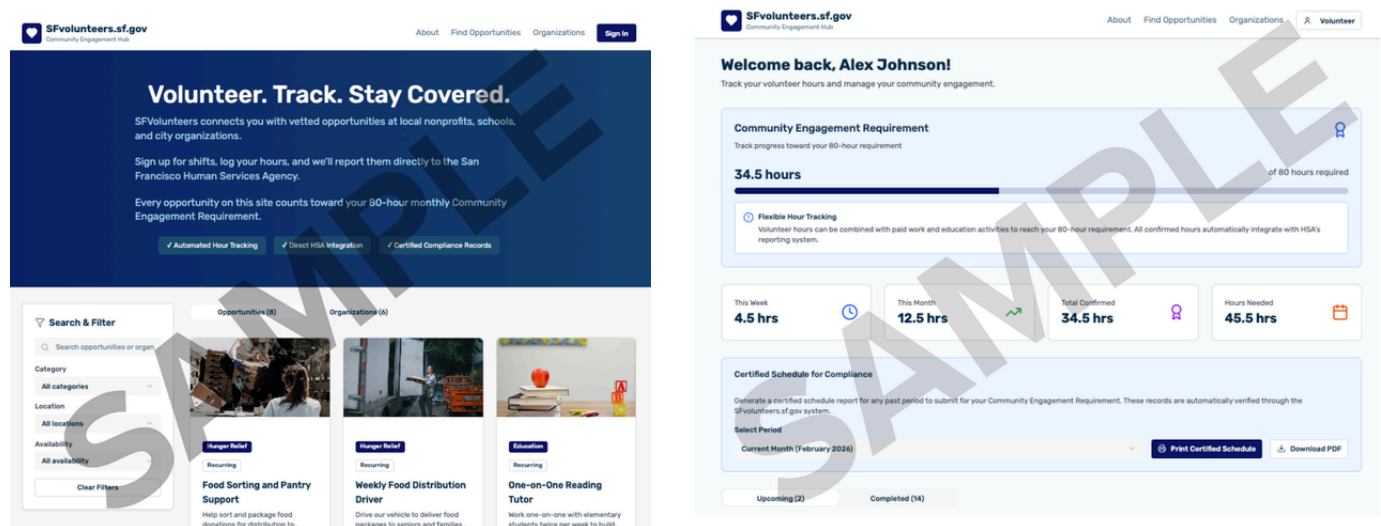


Figure 1. SFVolunteers Website Mockup

SFVolunteers would also serve community partners, including city departments, schools, and nonprofits, by providing a centralized place to list opportunities and manage volunteer recruitment. Equally important, SFVolunteers would automatically transmit volunteers' verified hours to CalSAWS, reducing the administrative burden on clients, SFHSA staff, and volunteer coordinators. The SFVolunteers platform would help streamline the surge of requests that community partners may receive from individual Medi-Cal clients seeking volunteer hours while also helping clients navigate the new requirements and maintain their Medi-Cal eligibility.

Moreover, with the city's current budget shortfall and proposed cost-saving efforts across departments, there is limited funding to hire additional staff to collect, upload, and manually verify nonstandardized volunteer documentation. SFVolunteers would address these problems by standardizing and automating the way that hours are documented and shared with SFHSA.

## Implementation

To build and launch SFVolunteers, we recommend the following implementation steps:

- **Establish clear oversight** — Appoint dedicated leadership for SFVolunteers who can design the program framework, create a coordinating committee, engage with community partners, and oversee implementation.
- **Implement human-centered design grounded in lived experiences** — Avoid the challenges seen in Georgia and Arkansas by designing SFVolunteers in partnership with stakeholders, including Medi-Cal clients, community partner staff, and SFHSA staff, to ensure that the solution prioritizes real workflows. Build accessibility and multilanguage support from the outset to ensure SFVolunteers serves San Francisco's diverse population.
- **Launch a simple, scalable digital platform** — Develop a centralized website where clients can browse opportunities, schedule shifts, and track progress toward the 80-hour monthly requirement. Integrate the platform with CalSAWS so that verified hours flow directly into eligibility systems.
- **Define measurable outcomes and iterate based on user feedback** — Set 1-, 3-, and 5-year goals that focus on enrollment rates, active participation, intuitive volunteer matching, and successful reporting rates, which all result in Medi-Cal coverage retention. Implement ongoing feedback with stakeholders to improve the platform continually.
- **Build awareness early and broadly** — Feature SFVolunteers on [BenefitsCal.com](https://www.benefitscal.com) as a qualifying pathway alongside jobs, job training, and education. Work with community partners to promote volunteering as an approved option through text messaging, flyers, and in-person outreach.

## Budget Summary

The proposed cost estimate for this proposal is \$1,100,000 to \$2,024,000 for the 2026 fiscal year, not taking into account potential matching federal funds (see detailed breakdown in the appendix).

- **Personnel and labor** (\$222,000 to \$250,000): Director of SFVolunteers and part-time contract support for outreach and partner engagement
- **Technology transformation** (\$468,000 to \$1,209,000): Platform design, build, and integration with CalSAWS
  - To accelerate deployment and reduce costs, SFHSA should customize existing volunteer management platforms (e.g., VolunteerMatch, Idealist, HandsOn Connect) rather than building from scratch. These platforms typically require

annual subscriptions. For example, Galaxy Digital’s GetConnected platform runs \$8,000 to \$15,000 per year,<sup>2</sup> with roughly \$10,000 for first-year implementation and training.

- **Program costs** (\$420,000 to \$565,000): User research, marketing and outreach, and training for staff and community partners for Year 1 and Year 2. Ongoing annual costs for 2027 and beyond are estimated at \$225,000 to \$335,000 for platform maintenance, hosting, security and compliance updates, and technical support.

**San Francisco could leverage a combination of its current budget and federal funding to offset development costs.** SFHSA could draw initial funding from its Technology Infrastructure and Technology Projects budgets. This initiative may qualify for a federal Medicaid technology match, which provides a 90% federal match for design, development, and implementation of Medicaid eligibility and enrollment systems and a 75% federal match for ongoing operations and maintenance.

**If you’d like to learn more, see the full project, including an including a platform prototype and demo video, at [aspenpolicyacademy.org/project/sfvolunteers-marketplace-2026](https://aspenpolicyacademy.org/project/sfvolunteers-marketplace-2026).**

## Endnotes

1. The following example is illustrative: Without SFVolunteers, clients would submit completed forms (e.g., Calfresh) to SFHSA each month for every community partner where they volunteered. If a client fulfilled their requirement across 6 community partners, and if each engagement required a 5-minute verification phone call, that would be 30 minutes of SFHSA staff time per client per month. For 5,000 clients, this would require 14 additional full-time staff solely for verifications. (Verification time estimate unconfirmed.)
2. Conversation with Galaxy Digital representative, February 23, 2026.

## Appendix: Cost Estimate Calculation

Technology Transformation Costs: Municipal Digital Volunteer Platform + CalSAWs Integration	Low	High
Core platform engineering	\$200,000	\$500,000
CalSAWS integration	\$75,000	\$200,000
Infrastructure and hosting	\$40,000	\$80,000
Implementation and change management	\$75,000	\$150,000
Contingency (20% to 30%)	\$78,000	\$279,000
<b>Year 1 Total</b>	<b>\$468,000</b>	<b>\$1,209,000</b>

Program Costs	Low	High
User research	\$85,000	\$120,000
Marketing and outreach	\$200,000	\$275,000
Partner training	\$135,000	\$170,000
<b>Year 1 Total</b>	<b>\$420,000</b>	<b>\$565,000</b>

<b>Personnel Costs</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>
Director, SFVolunteers	\$145,000	\$160,000
Outreach coordinator (contract 800 hours)	\$44,000	\$50,000
Partner engagement specialist (contract 600 hours)	\$33,000	\$40,000
<b>Year 1 Total</b>	<b>\$222,000</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>

These numbers were aggregated using two different large language models (Anthropic’s Claude 3.5 Sonnet and OpenAI’s ChatGPT-4o) with the following prompt: “How much does it cost to design and build a municipal digital volunteer platform and integrate with CalSAWS? This would serve over 50,000 people a year. Include hosting costs, engineering costs, integration costs, and implementation costs.” All amounts are in US dollars. Generative AI is experimental and information and image quality may vary. For more information on the extent and nature of AI usage, please contact us.



Photo by Edgar Chaparro



## About the Tech Executive Leadership Initiative (TELI)

This project was completed as part of TELI, a partnership between the Aspen Institute's Policy Academy and the Tech Talent Project. TELI is a multiweek skills-building initiative that prepares experienced technology leaders to engage effectively with public sector challenges. Learn more at [aspenpolicyacademy.org/teli](https://aspenpolicyacademy.org/teli).