Family Nutrition Programs

Enhancing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Certification: SNAP Modernization Efforts

Final Report

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Final Report

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STATE PROFILE OVERVIEW

State profiles documenting basic features of the 14 case study sites are included in this section. These profiles summarize the key modernization efforts implemented in each state and are organized as follows:

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Timelines are also included for key modernization efforts in each state, depicting the year of implementation for the initiatives and the caseload size at that time.

Table 1 provides an overview of modernization efforts planned and implemented for each of the 14 case study states.

Table 1: Modernization Activities Implemented in the Case Study States, by Type of Effort

Modernization Effort	CO	DC	ID	IL	IN	KS	MA	MS	NC	PA	TX	UT	WA	WI	Total
Policy Changes															
Simplified Reporting Requirements	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	14
Expanded Vehicle Exemption	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	14
Expanded Categorical Eligibility	✓	✓	✓	*		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11
Simplified Standard Utility Allowance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	11
Standard Self-Employment Deduction			✓		✓		✓						✓	✓	5
Self-Declaration of Dependent Care Deductions			✓				✓								2
Standard Medical Deductions			✓				✓		✓		✓				4
Revolving Door Waiver							✓			✓		✓		✓	4

Modernization Effort	CO	DC	ID	IL	IN	KS	MA	MS	NC	PA	TX	UT	WA	WI	Total
Face-to-Face Interview Waiver Certification					✓	*				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Face-to-Face Interview Waiver-Recertification		*	✓	✓	✓	*	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
CAP Programs			*				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	*	6
Reengineer Administrative Structures/Organizational Roles															
Restructuring the Up-front Process in Local Office	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	12
Shift to Workload/Task Based Systems for Managing Caseload	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Process Simplification and Improved Customer Access															
Combined or Simplified Application	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	14
Accept Applications & Recertification by Fax	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	14
Multilingual Language Telephone Lines	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓		✓		6
Redesigned Client Forms					✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		*		✓	6
Outstationed SNAP Workers	✓	*	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	9
Mobile Eligibility Units					✓			✓					✓		3
Changes in Office Hours	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓					7
Restructuring of Staffing Configurations															
Telecommuting												✓	✓		2
Changes in Staff Hours or Work Days		✓				✓		✓				✓			4
Use of Workgroups in Modernizing	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	9
Technological Innovations															
Call Centers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	12
Online Application and Benefit Tool				✓	✓	✓	✓	*	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Document Imaging	✓	*	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	12
Electronic Case Files	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11
Online Policy Manuals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	14
Data-sharing	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11
Upgrades or New MIS Systems	✓		✓						✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	7
New Worker Entry Systems			✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Partnering															
Community Based Organizations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	14
Businesses						✓						✓			2
Government Agencies	✓			✓		✓	✓			✓			✓		6

* Represents that the state is planning to implement the activity.

COLORADO CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

Colorado's SNAP program, known as the Food Assistance (FA) Program, has undertaken policy and technology changes to modernize SNAP at the state level. In particular, the technology changes involved the overhaul of its legacy management information systems (MIS) to an integrated system, called the Colorado Benefits Management System (CBMS). In taking steps to modernize the FA, the state is constantly looking at ways they can improve efficiency rates and the customer experience.

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➢ County administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):**
> ➢ 252,933 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➢ 2008 Unemployment: 4.9%

Modernization efforts for the FA program have also occurred at the local level, especially in changing how the program is delivered. Larimer County has implemented service delivery strategies to improve the customer flow and access. These strategies include moving to a single caseload and task-based management approach and allowing applications and recertifications to be conducted by phone through a call center. The City and County of Denver has also developed its own strategies to improve customer and work flow in its offices. The Denver office has also developed partnerships with other divisions in the Department of Human Services, where the FA program is administered, and community-based organizations to outstation caseworkers to take and process applications for FA.

Organizational Structure

The Colorado Food Assistance program is administered by the Office of Self-Sufficiency and Independence in the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS). In addition to FA, the office administers programs for aging and adult services, low-income energy assistance, vocational rehabilitation services, child support, and refugee services. Other offices in CDHS oversee Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), childcare, child welfare, mental health services, and juvenile justice.

The FA program in Colorado is county-administered, as are many of its public assistance programs. The 64 counties and 90 human services offices oversee the FA program in which they developed their own service delivery models and technology within the policies of CDHS, but all offices must use the state's MIS (CBMS) for FA. The county human services departments also administer the state Medicaid program, which is overseen by the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF).

Service Delivery Structure

As mentioned, county human services offices develop their own service delivery structure within the policies and program requirements set forth by the CDHS. Both Larimer County and Denver

DHS have similar service delivery in the offices visible to the customer. Both have clerical staff who manage the front desk, take applications, schedule interview appointments, answer general questions, and check in for appointments. Customers must make appointments to see a caseworker for an in-person interview. The waiting times for appointments are approximately one to three weeks. Recently, both the Larimer and Denver offices reengineered their business processes and moved to task-based case management models. In addition, Larimer County has a call center whose staff conduct phone interviews for applications and recertifications and answer questions about a customer's case. In Denver, DHS outstations workers at homeless shelters and child abuse and neglect prevention organizations to reach harder-to-serve populations that may be eligible for FA.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

The state's effort to develop an integrated MIS was spurred by the state legislature, looking for cost-saving measures for the state's public assistance programs. The previous system was considered outdated and inefficient. The state legislature provided a special appropriation for the project. The integrated MIS was intended to be easier for staff to use and customers to access, to have one database of customer information, and to allow the system to interact with other systems efficiently. CDHS also reviewed all of the state policy options that would help improve access to FA for customers.

For Larimer County and Denver, the main motivations to modernize FA were improving customer service and workload management. At the time, caseloads were increasing and, especially in Larimer County, there was high staff turnover after the implementation of CBMS. Leadership at these offices recognized the opportunity to make changes to become more efficient in managing staff workloads and improve service flow and access for the customer. Another impetus for the task-based model mentioned by officials in Larimer County was to ensure adequate planning of workload for family leave situations. With a single caseload for the office, an individual worker who was taking an extended leave would not have to spread their caseload across the other workers.

Key Goals or Outcomes

For its SNAP modernization efforts, CDHS leadership was concerned with improving timeliness, efficiency, and customer service. At the time of the development of the integrated MIS, the executive director of CDHS wanted to make the process of applying for programs so easy that staff would not need to know the program and the system would automatically select the programs for which the client was eligible.

In Larimer County, the goal for the task-based management approach and call center was to improve customer service while gaining efficiencies in staff time. On the customer service side, they wanted not to require people to come into the office and to encourage phone interviews as much as possible. Larimer County FA officials were also interested in changing workload management to increase efficiency and timeliness. For Denver's business process improvement project, the goals were to improve efficiency and quality; reduce business risks

such as timeliness, errors, noncompliance with state and federal processing guidelines; reduce backlogs of cases; and identify opportunities for technology to assist staff.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

For CDHS, the development of its integrated MIS was nearly a 10-year planning process led by the governor's technology office and involving two state agencies: CDHS and HCPF. Leadership from each of the programs, including FA, Medicaid, long-term care, TANF, and old-age pensions, formed a committee that guided the process from initial goals to implementation. The committee decided to open the work for the development of CBMS for bidding because the state did not have the internal staff and resources to dedicate to the project. A contractor was also hired to develop the Request for Proposal. Administrators and staff from the local offices were also involved in developing the "decision tables" for programming all of the eligibility requirements for each of the programs.

Several challenges occurred during the development process. The specifications of the original design of CBMS changed after the contractor was selected. In addition, the state and the contractor had difficulty working through all of the decision tables and mapping involved in programming the MIS to accommodate all of the program rules. The amount of programming needed to accommodate all of the decision tables to integrate the eligibility determination process was unanticipated.

Some difficulties also occurred during the early implementation of CBMS. For example, both the legacy and new MIS operated simultaneously during the transition. This created an unanticipated need for more servers for the systems, which caused the processing of cases for counties to be very slow for two weeks. In addition, there was a backlog of cases because the new system required more information to calculate future benefits and cases, which were converted from the legacy system. Additional data entry was needed to update the cases. The time staff spent in training on CBMS also led to a case backlog. It took time to recover from the initial implementation of CBMS, but fixes and adjustments were made even though funding and staff resources were limited.

For other efforts such as the recent redesign of the state web site, they have gone through an internal planning process at CDHS and have involved multiple divisions and HCPF because the focus is on integrating programs. For future efforts, county FA administrators of the 10 largest counties and the directors of county offices meet with the state on a monthly basis to discuss system and modernization issues. These meetings include discussions on state policy options, prioritization of modernization activities, and sharing of best practices.

The counties have their own planning processes for modernization efforts. Larimer County's development of the task-based model and call center was conducted internally. One of the big decisions they made was to staff the call center with caseworkers. Larimer DHS also hired a consultant to manage the change to the task-based approach. The consultant worked with the supervisors so they could be effective in training the caseworkers on the new system.

In Denver, planning the new business process model involved a group of key staff at DHS including staff from the mayor's technology office.

Modernization Efforts

The following section describes the modernization efforts undertaken by the State of Colorado and Denver and Larimer counties. At the state level, the focus on modernization efforts was on technology and policy changes. At the county level, modernization efforts involved changes to business processes and service delivery models.

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

➤ **Expanded Categorical Eligibility.** Colorado uses "hard" eligibility rules to determine expanded categorical eligibility.

➤ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.** The state has instituted simplified reporting requirements.

➤ **Simplified Standard Utility Allowance.** Colorado has a mandatory utility allowance for FA determinations.

➤ **Expanded Vehicle Exemption.** The state uses its childcare program rules for its vehicle exemption policy.

In addition, the state worked with FNS to develop rules to expand hardship criteria to waive face-to-face interviews. This allowed counties to implement new business models involving phone interviews for new applications and redeterminations.

Overall, these policy options were pursued by the state to improve customer access but also to help local offices increase efficiency. Policy changes are communicated by the state through policy letters disseminated to county offices. FA administrators of the 10 largest counties in Colorado discuss possible policy changes during monthly meetings with the state.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

CDHS allows local offices to reengineer their business processes to better serve customers and become more efficient in caseload management. The state encourages local offices to make changes that meet their customers' needs and supports this by obtaining FNS waivers such as for face-to-face interviews at application and recertification. The following section describes how two county human services departments in Colorado, Larimer County and the City and County of Denver, have reengineered their business processes. Denver also made organizational changes by outstationing workers. This is discussed under Partnering Arrangements, below.

Larimer County DHS has made significant changes to its business processes to improve customer access and to stretch limited resources. Larimer County DHS moved to a task-based model with a single caseload in 2007. Caseworkers no longer have their own caseload; there is a single caseload for the county. Supervisors assign groups of caseworkers to a single task on a weekly basis—usually interviews and eligibility determinations or recertifications. Based on open cases or potential backlog, supervisors provide caseworkers with a list of cases that need some action taken (e.g., verification of documents or recertification) to complete for the week. Responsibilities can shift and change during the week as the caseload needs change. Supervisors are constantly using tracking reports to make these decisions. One group of caseworkers has been dedicated to one task—taking calls and conducting interviews via the call center. Because of the level of training, these workers have long-term assignments to the call center but may be moved to other task eventually to avoid burning out.

The new service model design by Denver is also a task-based model. While Denver DHS is still in the early implementation phase of making changes to its business process, several changes have already started. First, Denver DHS has realigned its job classifications to reflect the task-based model. The department has also implemented new tracking of applications and their progress through the system. Finally, Denver DHS has begun dismantling the program-based groups and are starting to group workers by task (application and recertification) and by potential program "bundles." The idea is that caseworkers do not need to thoroughly know all programs but should be trained to process cases that are typically grouped (e.g., FA, TANF, and Medicaid but not old-age pension). Thus, caseworkers' training is focused on the bundled cases they are slated to handle. Further details on the activities Denver DHS is planning for its Business Process Improvement Project, is discussed under future plans.

Technological Innovations

The major statewide technological innovation in Colorado was the 2004 implementation of the CBMS. CBMS is the integrated MIS that replaced the legacy system. CBMS allows for the entry data from a single, combined application for multiple programs, an eligibility determination without any hand calculations prior to entry, tracking of documentation for multiple programs, and coordination notification of redeterminations. Across all its programs, CBMS serves nearly a half million customers that make up the 264,000 cases. Approximately 3,600 state and county staff use the system.

CDHS recently redesigned its web site to provide customer-focused information. The web site now includes information on how and where to apply, a link to the FNS eligibility tool, and locations of county offices. CDHS reviewed other states' web sites to determine the best aspects to tailor them to Colorado customers' needs. Continuing improvements to the web site are planned.

Other than the statewide MIS and web site, technological innovation—including call centers, paperless systems, and equipment upgrades—is driven by the county offices. These efforts are described below.

Call Centers

As discussed above, the state expanded its hardship criteria to waive the face-to-face interview for both the initial and recertification interviews every six months in 2009. Counties such as Larimer have taken advantage of this waiver. The Larimer County call center, housed in the Fort Collins office and called the Benefits Information Call Center, is staffed with caseworkers who handle initial interviews, interviews for redeterminations, change reporting, and other case actions. The call center received nearly 1,600 calls in March 2009 with about 85 percent of the case actions generated by the call resolved during the first call the customer made. Software for the phone system enables supervisors to monitor the call volume, wait times, and call resolutions for quality assurance.

Denver DHS has had a call center for three years that handles mostly informational calls. It is staffed and operated by a contractor, which has access to case files in CBMS, but does not have the ability to take any case actions. The call center staff can make address changes and provide information on the various programs, the application process, and Medicaid cards.

Paperless System

CDHS has an online policy manual and issues policy advisories via e-mail. The advisories are also available online. In 2003, Larimer County DHS instituted in-house document imaging capabilities. Once a case is approved or denied, the case information—application and supporting verification documents—are scanned. The files are then available electronically to caseworkers through in-house software.

Hardware Upgrades

The two counties visited for this study had made improvements to the technological equipment they use to enhance their ability to serve customers more efficiently. For its call center, Larimer County DHS purchased a new phone system (and accompanying software) that could handle the volume of calls the leadership anticipated and track the calls, the wait times, and the action produced by the calls. Call center staff are also equipped with dual computer monitors so they can look at the call data screen and the CBMS screen with the case file at the same time. In Denver, outstationed staff at homeless shelters and child abuse and neglect prevention sites were provided laptops so they could access CBMS and make eligibility determinations offsite.

Partnering Arrangements

While both local offices visited have partnerships in place for FA outreach, Denver DHS has created two partnerships where caseworkers are outstationed at off-site locations. The first partnership is between DHS and the Denver Road Home project—a 10-year local initiative to end homelessness. DHS has 14 caseworkers who spend about 80 percent of their time outstationed at 17 homeless shelters and other community organizations that serve the homeless in Denver. Each worker has a laptop from which to make eligibility determinations, typically for expedited FA. The homeless individuals served by the outstationed worker typically have an

EBT card within two hours. Outstationed workers can also offer bus and taxi vouchers for customers to go to the grocery store.

A second partnership is between Denver DHS's child welfare division and child abuse and neglect prevention and family reunification sites, called Family-to-Family sites funded by a foundation grant. Several caseworkers go to these sites, which are community-based organizations such as the YMCA, when families are having meetings with all the other service providers. These service providers including Denver DHS ensure that the family, who is typically in danger of losing their children or in the process of reunifying with their children, has the support it needs to become more stable. The services offered include rental assistance, transportation, work and education opportunities, and other public assistance such as FA as well as parenting classes. The DHS caseworker is able to work with the family to process applications for the programs for which they are eligible.

Outcomes Tracked

The state is currently monitoring improvements in payment accuracy and timeliness, which staff indicated is due to CBMS. However, it is unclear whether the move to an integrated MIS was a cost savings as originally intended by the state legislature. CDHS also has a dedicated staff person who evaluates and monitors the FA operations at the county offices and identifies and reports on modernization activities occurring across the state.

In Larimer County, the DHS staff are tracking outcomes for the call center and customer appointments for interviews. For the Benefits Information Call Center, the office is tracking the number of calls received and the number and percentage of calls resolved on the first attempt. From November 2008 to March 2009, calls increased from 1,393 to 1,594. During that same period, the resolution of calls on the first attempt increased from 68 percent to 85 percent. Larimer County staff are also tracking the number of applications submitted, no shows and cancellations for interviews, the average length of interview by caseworker, and incidences (case actions) resolved per week. Denver is closely tracking cases to avoid backlogs and to continue improving timeliness.

Challenges

Staff from the state and two county Departments of Human Services described the challenges they had in planning and implementing their modernization activities. The state's biggest and most publicized challenge was the implementation of the integrated MIS, CBMS. When the switch from the legacy system to CBMS occurred, the system slowed significantly for two weeks due an unanticipated need for more computer servers. The backlog that was created took county offices many months to overcome. State and county staff said the new MIS needed more testing or piloting prior to full implementation. Caseworkers also found CBMS challenging, as they had to go through many useless data entry screens for every application. In addition, county staff reported that many caseworkers left before and during the implementation of CBMS because of the difficulty of the change. In trying to make improvements to CBMS, the state has contended with limited resources and an inflexible contractual arrangement with the system's original developer.

Staff from both county DHSs discussed the challenge of implementing CBMS in their offices and having limited resources for managing increasing caseloads. However, other challenges arose during their own modernization activities. For Larimer County, the move to a task-based model with a single caseload was a major cultural shift for its staff. The notion of not having their own caseload or an ongoing relationship with their families was not welcomed by some caseworkers. Many staff left before and during the implementation of CBMS and the new business model, but Larimer DHS supervisors were able to train the new caseworkers who had no attachment to the old systems. Denver DHS has been hampered by the limited capability of the contracted call center and does not allow them to take advantage of the state policy option to conduct interviews by phone. Interviews must be done by caseworkers and Denver DHS must bring the call center in-house to make phone interviews possible.

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

While the development of the integrated MIS was difficult at times, the state indicated that it saw improvements in the information that staff can access from CBMS. New policies are applied consistently across local offices because of the design of the new MIS. In addition, payment accuracy and timeliness has improved greatly for Colorado. One lesson that state staff shared was that incremental changes for modernization efforts, such as the integrated MIS, may help to smooth the implementation process and allow for adjustments along the way.

According to Larimer County staff, it is also important to work with staff to manage the changes to the system. In moving to a single caseload management model, some Larimer caseworkers resisted giving up their personal relationship with the client. Having the call center also made moving to the task-based case management model easier so caseworkers did not have to field calls from clients anymore. Communicating these operational changes to partners was also important to help clients adjust to the new system.

For Denver DHS, it was helpful to bring in technology staff from the mayor's office to the Data Operations Team at DHS to manage the Business Processes Improvement Project. Staff indicated that this step was needed because these individuals did not have the attachment to the old systems that program staff had. For program staff, it was important for leadership to communicate the changes to them through regular presentations.

Future Plans

For continuing and future modernization efforts, the state convenes a monthly meeting of all directors from the counties and a monthly meeting with the FA directors from the counties with the 10 largest caseloads. Ideas are discussed and activities prioritized for future efforts. The state is continuing its improvements to CBMS by working with its new contractor to make the system more user-friendly and reduce number of data-entry screens workers must go through for each case. Discussions for future plans at the state level have involved how to move to a web-based MIS, implement document imaging and an online application, and create a statewide call center. CDHS hired a consulting firm to conduct a study to pinpoint the natural progression of modernization efforts. The state would like to develop and implement these modernization

efforts in the next two years. Some funding from the state legislature to HCPF is already available for modernization.

The state is also continuing its review of policy options to support its modernization efforts. Leadership at CDHS also wants to develop partnerships with and train staff at food banks and other community organizations so they can help their customers access and apply for FA.

Larimer DHS also continues to improve its call center operations and its task-based management model. The level of growth of the call center was unexpected, so Larimer DHS continues to expand and improve operations. Larimer DHS also continues to tweak the task-based model as new ways to improve customer service and efficiency arise.

Denver DHS has been engaged in a planning project since 2007 to change the business process model for its offices to improve customer service and office efficiency. The planning team is comprised of program staff and led by a member of the Data Operations team within DHS. The scope of the business process changes covers the major program areas served by its Division of Family and Adult Services (FA, TANF, childcare, Medicaid, and adult protection). The key changes that are being planned are to create a common intake process, front-load the ongoing case processing, use a task-based model for workload management, provide more up-front advice to customers on resources, restructure the lobby for better customer flow, make better use of web-based services and assistance, and provide more training to workers. Some changes have been recently implemented, including improvements to the lobby processes. The task-based model is being piloted at one of its satellite offices. Denver is also looking to move the call center operations in-house so it can be staffed by caseworkers. This would enable the call center to handle interviews and change reporting to reduce the need for customers to visit the office. Finally, Denver is creating a data warehouse that uses data extracted from CBMS to develop detailed reports for workload management and tracking of customer outcomes.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
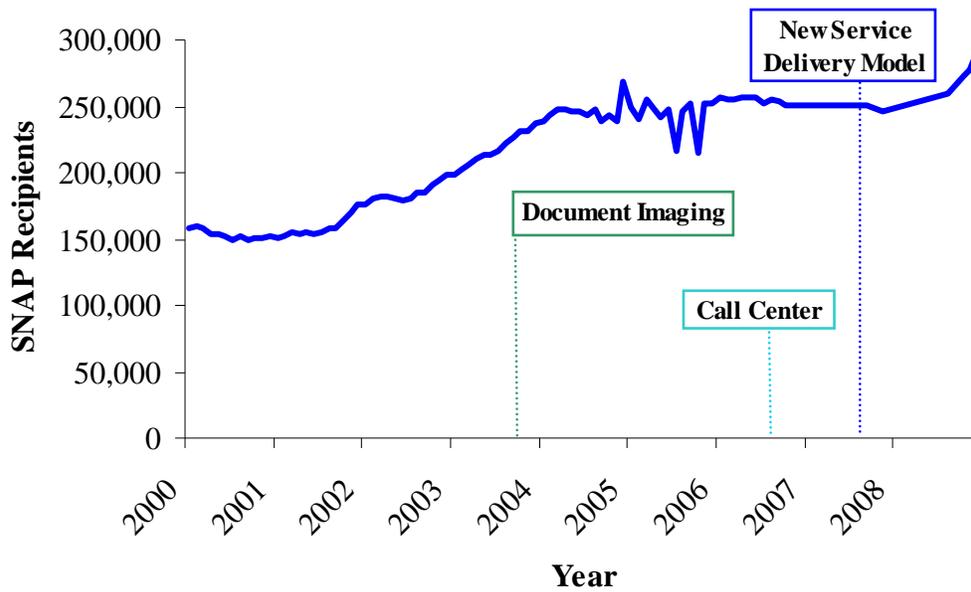
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Colorado Department of Human Services, Denver, CO (state office)
Larimer County Department of Human Services, Fort Collins, CO (local office)
Denver Department of Human Services, Denver, CO (local office)
April 2009

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

Since 2002, Washington D.C. has taken an incremental approach to modernizing its benefits system, through policy options, minor administrative changes, and the use of a call center. As options and waivers became available, District staff sought to simplify the system by adopting vehicle exemptions, simplified reporting, and extended recertification periods. At the same time, they opened a change center and implemented technological advances such as language lines and online policy manuals to increase customer access and reduce staff workload.

In recent years, changes in leadership, increases in caseloads, and staff shortages have led the city's Income Maintenance Administration (IMA) to take a comprehensive approach to modernization by implementing and planning significant business process reengineering, partnerships, and new technologies. Case banking initiatives were piloted at one service center and are being expanded to the rest of city. IMA has also initiated document imaging and wants to expand its use of partnerships and the responsibilities of its call center.

Organizational Structure

Washington, D.C.'s SNAP falls under the Income Maintenance Administration (IMA), an agency within the Department of Human Services (DHS). In addition to SNAP, IMA determines eligibility for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Program on Work, Employment and Responsibility (POWER), childcare subsidies, burial assistance, emergency rental assistance, interim disability assistance, and refugee cash assistance. In 2007, IMA took on the eligibility determination for the new D.C. Healthcare Alliance Program. While IMA determines eligibility for medical programs, these programs are not officially administered by the IMA or DHS.

IMA operates five local service centers thorough the city. For the most part, caseworkers, called Social Service Representatives (SSRs) are "generic" and handle cases for all the benefit programs administered by IMA. Some local offices have implemented varying levels of worker specialization, as discussed below. Service centers have good deal of procedural flexibility and can work with the IMA to make procedural changes, however, IMA is working to standardize as many of the business processes as possible. Office staff are District employees.

As a part of its SNAP modernization process, the District created an IMA Change Center, which houses and operates a call center and several processing units. The Change Center Unit makes changes on all cases administered by the IMA. The New Hires Unit makes employment-related changes on TANF and TANF-SNAP cases. The Special Project Unit completes case

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QUICK FACTS:

State vs. County Administered:
➢ State-Administered

Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):
➢ 89,442 people

Economic or Contextual Factors:
➢ 2008 Unemployment: 7%
➢ Hiring freeze
➢ High foreclosure rates
➢ Changing administration at the IMA – Interim Director

change and processing projects were necessary. The Telephone Unit operates the District-wide call center, answering program questions and making changes on all cases. The Completion Unit lifts and imposes TANF and SNAP sanctions.

Service Delivery Structure

As of the June 2009, the IMA was undergoing a structural shift in how it administers its various benefit programs, described in detail below, based on a pilot program conducted at the District's Eckington Service Center and on similar changes implemented in Florida. At the time of our visit, the remaining four D.C. service centers were operating on a traditional case management model where each worker was fully responsible for a certain caseload. However, D.C. service centers are moving towards a "case banking" shared caseload approach, where staff are assigned to different parts of the eligibility determination process—intake, interviews, document processing, etc.—on a daily rotating basis. Under the new system, no staff person carries a caseload.[1] This process change is part of the larger, front-end intake system designed to increase access and efficiency through streamlined processes, consolidation of service centers, and increased technology in the form of electronic applications, kiosks, and document imaging.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

Recent structural shifts and technological modernization efforts were reportedly the result of new leadership at the DHS and increased case loads at the service centers. Leadership from the DHS Director, Clarence Carter, and site visits to Florida, Utah, and other innovative jurisdictions, spurred department interest in implementing changes in business practices and technology to make the jobs of eligibility workers more efficient and accurate. The modernization should also benefit the clients by providing a new avenue to benefits. Staff mentioned, however, that modernization during the last 10 years has been a steady process, with policy staff and leadership constantly looking for new policies and initiatives that might improve access, efficiency, and benefits for both staff and clients.

Key Goals or Outcomes

Key outcome goals of SNAP modernization processes, as articulated by IMA administrators include maintaining and increasing customer access, reducing the case backlog, increasing the timeliness of benefits, reducing error rates, simplifying processes for workers and clients, creating a "no wrong door" system for applicants, encouraging community-based organizations to assist customers to take applications, upgrading systems technology so that information from web application go straight into the District's MIS system, the Automated Client Eligibility Determination System (ACEDS), and increasing customer satisfaction.

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[1] Since the time of the Urban Institute's interviews, IMA has implemented "case banking" in all its centers.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

IMA policy staff noted they deliberated policy changes as they were made available by FNS and made the decision to apply for various options or waivers based on (1) whether those changes would be permanent, and (2) whether the changes simplified the process for clients or staff.

For other modernization efforts, IMA staff noted that the planning and early implementation process occurs in three general phrases. First, either IMA staff or local advocates propose a modernization effort and they discuss the feasibility and usefulness of the efforts at monthly IMA meetings. Second, they form a business process, clearly detailing how the modernization effort will look in the District and the goals of the effort. For the move to a case banking and paperless system, IMA staff visited similar initiatives in Florida and modified Florida's effort to fit D.C. Third, District staff put special emphasis on the importance of piloting efforts and incorporating "test periods" where staff implementing an effort are given a certain amount of flexibility and opportunity to offer feedback. This requires multiple meetings with both administrative and front line workers and a malleable implementation plan.

Modernization Efforts

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

➤ **Expanded Vehicle Exemption.** As part of the 2002 Farm Bill options, D.C. chose to match their SNAP vehicle exemption policy to the TANF program, thereby eliminating vehicles from the eligibility determinations process.

➤ **Simplified Reporting.** Also soon after the 2002 Farm Bill options, the D.C. implemented simplified reporting to simplify the process for clients and to reduce work for staff. Staff reported, however, that both clients and staff were often confused about what to report and when.

➤ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.** Reporting periods increased from 6-month reporting to 12- and 24-month reporting for most customers. SSI clients are eligible for the 24-month reporting, while those who are homeless are still subject to 6-month reporting. This change cut down on the workload in local offices caused by frequent recertifications. The change in reporting periods, combined with semiannual midcertification ("midcert") also aimed to decrease error rates. A midcert form is sent to recipients in the fifth or sixth month of their reporting period, which they must fill out and mail, fax or bring to the office. The midcert requires fewer verification documents than a full recertification. If clients fail to complete the midcert, their benefits are discontinued.

➤ In 2003, the District standardized change reports by moving from mandated reports 10 days after a change occurs to reports on the 10th day of the following month. This

change has aligned the reporting policy for SNAP with other benefits programs administered by IMA and simplified reporting for clients.

> **Expanded Categorical Eligibility.** In October 2009, IMA began implementation of categorical eligibility for those households receiving a service that is funded by TANF/MOE funds. The option was chosen primarily to increase benefits for IMA clients. For those households, members are not subject to SNAP income or resource limits. At the time of our interviews, what would count as a TANF/MOE-funded service had not yet been determined, and whether all members of the household needs to receive a service or just one member.

> **Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview at Recertification.** The District has a waiver of face-to-face interviews for those clients that can prove hardship, and, at the time of our visit, planned to apply for a waiver from FNS to conduct all recertification interviews by phone.

For several years, D.C. has used a combined application, which allows customers to apply for the SNAP program along with the various other benefits provided by IMA. In addition, the application was abbreviated, from more than 10 pages to 6 pages, and simplified, adjusting the application language to a third-grade reading level.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

Modified Case Banking

In May 2007, the IMA piloted a new service delivery model called case banking, based on similar changes implemented in Florida. Under the case banking system, all service center staff rotate between various parts of the intake and case processing, and no single staffer carries a caseload. Instead, the entire service center shares the caseload, with staff working on various aspects of the case for a given period of time. Rotating positions include: interviewing, reviewing applications, processing completed applications or recertifications, and inputting information into the MIS (ACEDs).

At the time of the visit, case banking was implemented at the Eckington Service center and the District planned to expand the pilot to all D.C. service centers and, in the process, close and consolidate some service centers. The case banking project aimed to eliminate the case backlog, reduce the processing time for applications, enable the local offices to weather reductions in staff, and increase customer satisfaction with processes in the local offices. Although some clients feel more comfortable with a designated caseworker, generally clients respond positively to the case-banking system.

Express Line and New Intake Procedures

As part of the larger case banking process, service centers implemented new intake procedures. The front desk was staffed by at least one clerk, a caseworker, and a supervisor. When customers enter the center they register with the clerk, who checks that the customer's

case is in the system, adds a case if none is open, and logs the customer's name, the date, and the purpose of the visit. For quicker transactions (e.g., dropping off verification documents), the caseworker directs the customer to the express line. As soon as application documents are dropped off at the express desk, caseworkers or clerks log the information into ACEDS and print out a receipt for the client, providing proof of documentation receipt.

Change Center

Since 2002, the IMA has operated the IMA Change Center to process reported changes. The Change Center is comprised of one section chief, five supervisors, and 25 caseworkers spread across four units—the Telephone unit, the Completion unit, the Special Projects unit, and the New Hires unit. The Change Center makes changes on all IMA administered benefits programs. Each unit deals with the SNAP program in some manner with the telephone unit working most directly on SNAP benefits.

The four units within the IMA Change Center process changes on all cases administered by the IMA and each unit deals with the SNAP program in some manner. The Completion Unit deals primarily with TANF and SNAP sanctions for those who do not comply with the respective work requirements. Special Projects staff deal with over- and underpayments due to changes and various other ad hoc projects that are needed. The most recently added unit, the New Hires Unit, deals primarily with TANF employment information, which occasionally affects eligibility and benefit levels for SNAP. The Telephone Unit, discussed further below, receives and processes SNAP changes.

Flexible Work Schedules

In 2007, as an administrative savings measure and because of staff demand, some service center staff were allowed to use a flexible work schedule, working nine days over two weeks, in most cases taking every other Friday off.

Translation Services

Around 2001, D.C. implemented various changes to reduce language barrier to deal with an increasingly diverse client population. A call-in translation service, Language Line, provides translation services when no available staff speaks a customer's language. Paper applications are available in three languages. Additionally, D.C. benefits from a diverse group of partner agencies that provide interpreters to accompany clients to the local office and reduce language barriers.

Fax Changes or Recertifcations

IMA offices accept mailed or faxed applications, changes, verification documents, recertifications and midcertifications. Staff noted that this option has been in place for a long time, but is not expansively used for recertifications.

Extended Office Hours

Starting before 2000, select service centers have extended hours on Wednesday nights to accommodate working clients who cannot visit during the day. Staff in the Eckington Service Center noted that an extra caseworker was added recently to the Wednesday night staff to handle increased demand.

Technological Innovations

Call Center

Since 2002, the IMA Change Center has housed and operated a call center to process reported changes. The call center, or Telephone Unit, is the unit within the Change Center that works most directly on SNAP benefits. Staff answer calls for change reports, and since 2006, general customer service inquiries. Staff noted that the most frequent calls are for SNAP changes due to births, rent, and household changes, and change in earned income or work hours.

Electronic Applications

The D.C. initiated a printable online application in July 2009. The District also plans to fully automate its application process, allowing for an e-signature and online submission. District staff noted that online applications are e-mailed to the service center and the application would be processed in the same manner as a faxed application.

Paperless System

In 2008, IMA changed its ACEDS system (the District's MIS) to allow case managers to type in their interview narratives directly into the system. Previously, case narratives were stored as a hard copy. This change reduced paper and increased efficiency for caseworkers.

In addition, IMA plans to implement a document imaging system in 2010 for all District service centers to keep all applications, forms, and verification documents. Implementation of the system is part of the District's reinvestment plan to reduce error rates. At the time of our interviews, the plan awaited FNS approval, but initial purchases of scanning equipment had been made and files had been analyzed and organized for scanning.

Data-Sharing

In addition to the various IMA benefits data already housed in ACEDS, IMA imports data on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Department of Employment Services (DOES), the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), LIHEAP, and Unemployment Insurance (UI) to verify records. It also pays for a verification service called the Work Number, which gathers employment information from employers. The Work Number is a national database, which, while not exhaustive, allows IMA to verify employment for many of its customers.

Other Technological Innovations

In early 2004, IMA put its 600-page policy manual online for staff to access. The online policy manual includes key word searches and is updated regularly.

As part of the new case banking system, service centers have automated the pending case list to process the oldest cases first. Pending summaries are internal in the piloted service center system, and all management staff can access the summary. IMA plans to expand the case banking system with its automated lists from the pilot site to each service center.

As part of the "no wrong door" policy, and in concert with electronic applications, the District plans to put kiosks in the lobbies of each service center and in various community based organizations where clients can both learn about and apply for SNAP benefits.

Partnering Arrangements and Information Sharing

Partnering arrangements and off-site application assistance

IMA staff noted that D.C. is a "partner rich" city, both in terms of advocacy networks and direct client services. Advocates were relevant in alerting IMA staff to various modernization initiatives going on around the country and options available through FNS and other agencies and programs. As mentioned above, many have helped directly in the application process. Both IMA staff and staff at a local community-based organization (CBO) noted that partner staff will act as an authorized representative or will accompany certain individuals to help with transportation, translation, or the application itself. Specifically, partner staff would provide translation services for immigrant populations or application help for those who are mentally ill or illiterate.

Currently, IMA has informal relationships with several CBOs to help clients use the online eligibility tool and to fill out the online application. As part of the broader IMA administrative and organizational changes, IMA staff noted they want to expand the use of community-based partners especially those located around service centers that are being consolidated or closed. These CBOs will be used to fill out online and hard-copy applications, allowing clients access to SNAP without having to come to the service centers. IMA staff plans to pick up completed applications and set up phone-interviews with clients. To further expand access, IMA staff also mentioned the possibility of placing kiosks off-site at partner organizations and in the community.

Information Sharing

IMA provides referrals to local food banks or advocacy networks for clients in need, and in turn, partners provided their clients information on SNAP, handing out SNAP applications and offering information on how to apply at the service centers. IMA staff noted that to reach vulnerable populations, like the elderly or the homeless, service centers provide benefit information to elder homes and shelters. IMA staff plans to outstation service workers at various community partners to provide information and applications. Outstationed workers can complete

the entire application process by connecting to ACEDS wirelessly at sites with Internet connections.

Outcomes Tracked

Staff used FNS reported measures of participation, accuracy, and timeliness to assess the modernization effort in D.C. Customer satisfaction surveys were also given as part of the quality assurance process, although along with most other outcome measures, the surveys are not easily attributable to specific modernization efforts.

Individual service centers also mentioned administering small-scale customer service surveys to clients as they exited the building. Staff discuss this information at meetings, which sometimes directly covers modernization efforts. They also noted that the success of a modernization effort could be gauged by the number of calls and complaints they received after implementation, or by staff absenteeism and turnover.

Challenges

Both administrative and front-line IMA staff noted several challenges to successfully implementing modernization efforts. Challenges that staff reported included: administration of multiple programs, cultural barriers, high staff turnover, and staff shortages.

Because IMA administers multiple Federal and District benefits under one agency, and does eligibility determinations for medical programs administered by other agencies, changes in one system reportedly required a significant amount of coordination. For example, when program criteria are changed for SNAP, but not for other programs, special code needs to be written so that the new policy or rule only affects the SNAP benefits. This was reportedly difficult for both the technology staff, for intake workers trying to figure out where information goes and which polices affect what benefits, and for clients who were confused by how the new rule or policy affected their benefits as a whole.

In particular, with new technology but also with administrative changes, some people were hesitant to modernize. Some workers had spent more than 10 years getting used to a system and were not quick to embrace a new way of administering SNAP. Clients also reportedly resisted change in some circumstances, noting they were suspicious of new technology and wanted to apply in a way they knew would work.

Due to the difficulty and workload of the job, staff noted high turnover rates. The loss of a staff member meant being short a worker for a period of time and losing knowledge that would need to be replaced. Because staff need to know all the benefits under the IMA's aegis, getting up to speed reportedly takes a while, especially under the new case banking, "generic" positions. This was particularly a problem when service centers lost older, more seasoned employees who knew the SNAP policy well and could help train others on the job. In the words of one employee "FNS is rules driven; institutional knowledge is really great."

Low staff levels also presented a problem for some administrators. Caseloads across District centers rose dramatically within the last year while staff levels remained the same, or in some cases dropped.[2]

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

District administrators feel that the modernization efforts have been generally successful in providing clients with timely and comprehensive services.

IMA staff members who were part of the administrative change from case management to case banking saw several successful outcomes of this modernization process. Staff noted significant reductions in the time it takes to approve and process an application, with one noting "turnover for applications went from 30 or 40 days to a week." Staff also commented that clients reacted extremely well to the case banking model because it reduced wait times for each step of the process. The staff reacted positively too, noting that they no longer had a backlog of cases. Supervisors reported a higher staff moral and less absenteeism due to the new approach.

From the efforts implemented thus far, IMA staff pointed to several factors that would have, or did, positively effect the modernization of SNAP. These factors are described below:

- ➢ **Pilot initiatives.** District staff noted that piloting their case banking system was crucial for its success, allowing planners to locate problem areas and to get input from all levels of staff.

- ➢ **Use workers from the pilot to help with expansion.** When expanding a pilot initiative, the District used staff from the original site to help new sites implement a given effort. According to District staff, this was the most effective way to avoid repeating mistakes.

- ➢ **Allow local-level flexibility in implementation.** Allow for a "testing period" with flexibility to help staff transition into the new case banking system and to "fit" the system to the service center. This included allowing frequent feedback and mechanisms for addressing that feedback throughout the process. Staff also noted that given that each center is run differently to some extent, when pilots are expanded, a certain amount of flexibility needs to be given to each site so that they can choose what is most efficient.

- ➢ **Articulate modernization expectations to staff.** Clear communication on what was expected of workers for a given modernization effort went a long way in realizing true implementation.

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[2] Staff levels increased at the Eckington Service center for the implementation of the "Case Banking" pilot program. Staff were not new hires; they were shifted from other service centers. The Eckington Service center has since been closed, however, and its employees were dispersed across the other District Service Centers.

> ➤ **Ensure adequate staff.** District staff put special emphasis on ensuring adequate staff levels for their administrative change to a case banking system. This gave administrators a clearer idea of how the process could work.

> ➤ **Choose policies wisely.** District staff made strong efforts only to choose policy options and waivers that would simplify SNAP. Staff were wary of new policies that had a chance of being repealed by FNS, noting a lot of time is spent on adapting a system to a policy so changes need to be permanent.

> ➤ **Develop testing mechanisms.** Staff noted the importance of testing staff after the training period to make sure ideas, policies, and processes were adequately learned.

> ➤ **Define goals before automation.** Staff noted that automation should never drive service delivery. In other words, a service delivery process should be decided on, and then technology should be brought in to support that process and to make it run more smoothly. Too often, staff noted, technology is brought in before adequate thought is given to how the process would best be run. In at least one staff member's opinion, changing a service delivery model should not be accomplished solely through technology.

Future Plans

As mentioned above, the District is currently undergoing a broad systems change, restructuring how it receives and processes applications. Under the new system, all service centers will use the case banking model, rotating staff positions on a regular basis. As part of the "no wrong door" approach, the District wants to increase the number of ways a client can apply for SNAP, introducing kiosks and online applications with e-signatures, and putting more emphasis on phone interviews and application assistance at local CBOs. At the same time, IMA has begun consolidating offices. To some extent, these plans are contingent on getting approval for broader face-to-face waivers and e-signatures.

To the extent possible, the District is also seeking ways for electronic applications to feed directly into the ACEDS system. In addition, the District is moving towards a completely paperless system, and has already started the document imaging process by examining how and what files will be scanned. Staff were planning the data entry process to ensure accuracy in matching information to a client.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
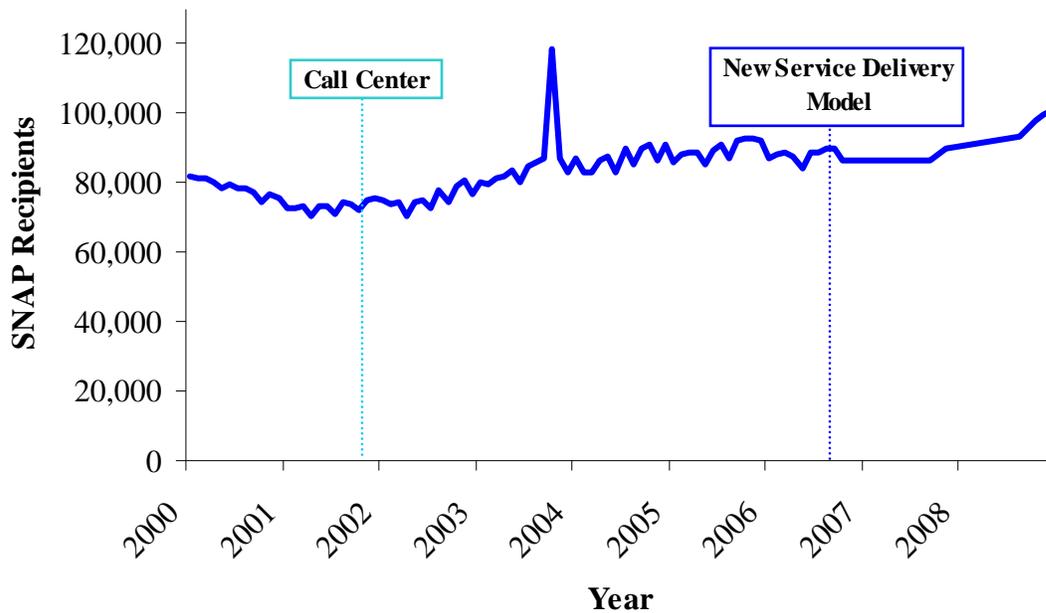
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Department of Human Service, Income Maintenance Administration (IMA) Offices, Washington D.C. (District office and service center)
Eckington Service Center, Washington, D.C. (service center, closed since our visit)
IMA Change Center, Washington DC
April 2009

IDAHO CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

The state of Idaho began its effort to modernized SNAP in the early 2000s. Budget cuts and state government layoffs precipitated the need to improve performance, streamline operations, and develop more effective policies while also increasing participant access to the program.

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State or County Administered:**
> ➢ State-administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):**
> ➢ 100,198 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➢ 2008 Unemployment: 4.9%

Many of the modernization efforts implemented by Idaho infuse technological improvements into service delivery. Caseworkers now have a set of "eTools" that help them make determinations and track caseloads, including electronic case files. The state has also implemented a new service delivery process, a centralized processing and call center, and is in the process of developing and planning for the implementation of a new web-based management information system (MIS).

Organizational Structure

The Department of Health and Welfare (DHW), is Idaho's largest state agency with more than 3,000 employees, and is responsible for the state's SNAP program. The Division of Welfare, within DHW, administers SNAP. In addition, The Division also oversees other services including administering energy assistance, weatherization, Child support enforcement, and work services; and eligibility for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid, state supplemental security income, and childcare. The Division of Welfare (also known as the Self Reliance Program), has two deputy administrators—one responsible for SNAP policy and the other responsible for SNAP operations.

The Division of Welfare divides the state into seven regions covered by 27 field offices, which conduct all intake services. The Westgate Office in Boise is the largest of the field offices and houses the newly implemented Treasure Valley Processing Center, which processes SNAP recertifications and changes as well as operates a call center for the entire state.

With this organizational structure, the Division of Welfare has made efforts to standardize SNAP operations across regions and field offices. Policy and business process changes are communicated in writing to field office managers, and state-level administrators directly supervise the local managers to ensure that changes are uniformly administered statewide. For larger changes, an "implementation unit," of trainers will orient local office staff to the change and conduct direct-observations or, "alignment follow-ups," to ensure that the change is implemented uniformly.

Service Delivery Structure

The service delivery structure was recently modified to increase customer satisfaction and efficiency. The old system used a traditional model with clerical workers as greeters and caseworkers assigned individual caseloads. The new business model relies on decision-makers (caseworkers) up-front and a single-state caseload. The new delivery structure is described in detail later in this report.

The goal is for eligibility caseworkers, called Self Reliance Specialists (SRSs), to work in many different assistance programs operated by the Division of Welfare. They are generally trained first to work on SNAP and then add on the additional programs as they gain experience.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

Several factors motivated Idaho's Division of Welfare leadership to modernize state SNAP operations and policies. First, the state faced sanctions in the early 2000s for SNAP for payment accuracy. At the same time, Idaho state government had eliminated a fifth of the agency's positions and the SNAP caseload had almost doubled. Finally, Idaho's leadership recognized that its efforts at modernizing SNAP policies (for example, removing asset tests) were behind those of other states.

With these concerns to overcome, the Division of Welfare saw that it needed to make significant changes in its management information system, policies, and field operations. The state also recognized that local control over operations presented a challenge. Each region and office operated differently and directives from the state were sometimes ignored. Application and redetermination processing happened at the local level so individual offices had major backlogs of cases, hurting the state's timeliness. The state also saw that the technical limitations of the legacy MIS were a major barrier to improving performance. The Division of Welfare began to overhaul SNAP operations, including the service delivery model, the diffuse control of operations, and its MIS to resolve these issues.

Key Goals and Outcomes

Idaho's Division of Welfare carefully developed a roadmap for modernizing SNAP in conjunction with other programs, including Medicaid and cash-assistance programs. Its stated goals are to quickly and accurately deliver services, improve access, provide better services to vulnerable populations, improve consistency in service delivery, change processes and culture, and comply with federal and state regulations. To meet these goals, the Division outlined its key operational priorities for improvement—automated development, service intake, and processing centers—with the overarching priority of having a customer focus. The expected results are the maximization of the customer experience, productivity, and high performance. All of the modernization activities are then tied to achieving these results.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

The key challenge to the planning process and implementation mentioned was "how do you really make change happen?" Earlier attempts to make broad policy changes were difficult because the 27 local offices would implement changes differently reflecting each office's different administrative structure. According to one respondent, "the scattershot approach" to change was not working. The lesson Division leadership learned from these early failures was that change needed to happen to the overall business processes and administrative structure and the policy efforts would fall into place from there. Once this shift in thinking occurred, the state office staff were able to focus on working collectively on the highest priorities.

Representatives from the Division of Welfare looked to other states for models, and visited Washington state, Florida, Arizona, and California to learn about their modernization efforts. In particular, Idaho planned to adapt California's MIS and tools, for which California shared the technology it developed.

From these early discussions, several priority projects—EPICS Replacement (move from legacy to web-based MIS), service delivery model (intake process), and the processing center (consolidation of case maintenance)—emerged to improve the SNAP program along with other programs managed by the Division. All of the projects were developed to ensure that there was a focus on improving the customer experience, performance, and productivity.

Work began on the three-year EPICS Replacement project in June 2006. A key part of the planning process for the EPICS Replacement project was the use of "agile software development," a private sector approach to new product develop that allows for maximum flexibility and highlights incremental steps. To use this business method, the Division of Welfare hired software developers and placed staff from within the Division over the various teams working on the various elements of the EPICS Replacement project. Accenture, which developed the California MIS, was hired to consult on the project but not manage it. The teams, led by two DHW managers, one from the Division of Welfare and one from the Information Technology Services Division, worked with program staff to develop a wish list of functions and tools for the new web-based MIS. This wish list included a set of "eTools" that caseworkers and supervisors could work all case records electronically (eCaseFile) or consolidate many interfaces to determine eligibility into a single web-based tool (eVerif-I). As key products were completed, rigorous testing with supervisors and caseworkers occurred to identify any software program glitches before formally rolling out the products. Once the tools were completed, the products were piloted in a number of offices before being fully implemented across the state. At the time of the visit, the state office was training staff on the new MIS, called IBES.

The new service model was conceived in 2007 and piloted in various state offices beginning fall 2007. The piloting of various configurations identified problems and opportunities and refined the model until statewide implementation of the new service delivery model began in June 2008. By December 2008, all field offices had implemented the "New Service Delivery" system.

Modernization Efforts

SNAP modernization activities focused on organizational changes, changes to administrative functions and business processes, and technological changes. As designed by the state, the technological changes were intended to support the organizational and operational changes to the SNAP program. These activities are as follows:

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

When planning SNAP modernization activities, state-level SNAP administrators decided to shift from a past focus on policy to concentrate state modernization efforts on business process changes and uniformly implementing existing policies. Therefore, recent policy changes are minimal, and designed to follow changes in business processes. To ensure that policy changes reflect the experiences of staff on the ground state administrators consult with local office supervisors, managers, caseworkers and clerical staff when considering policy changes.

The state has been granted several FNS waivers allowed under the 2002 Farm Bill and Idaho adopted many of the new benefit delivery options. The changes include:

➢ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.** The simplified reporting requirement changes were designed to provide families with a stable food stamp allotment, reduce the number of reportable changes, improve customer service and reduce the effort required to maintain open SNAP cases.

➢ **Expanded Vehicle Exemption.** One vehicle per adult household member is excluded.

➢ **Expanded Categorical Eligibility.** Idaho has "soft" eligibility requirements.

➢ **Simplified Standard Utility Allowance.** Rather than using actual expenses in the determination of this deduction, standardized utility allowances are used.

➢ **Simplified Deductions.** Idaho uses a simplified medical deduction.

➢ **Simplified Self-Employment Determination.** The state uses a 50 percent flat rate.

➢ **Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview at Recertification.** This waiver has been actively used by the state in designing its processing center (which includes a call center) and new service delivery model to conduct interviews by phone for recertification.

➢ **Simplified Determination of Deductions.** Includes childcare, child support, and shelter costs.

> ➤ **Electronic Application Filing.** Idaho had kiosks in some local offices and piloted an electronic application. The pilot had challenges because customers struggled with the impersonal interaction with the automated process, entering data into the computer, rather than filling out a paper application or talking to caseworker directly, when they were already in a local office. Idaho decided to wait on electronic applications until other modernization activities were implemented.

In the summer of 2009, Idaho planned to implement a one-year removal of the SNAP asset test to help families weather the economic downturn while reducing processing time for workers.

The Division of Welfare has plans to pursue a Combined Application Project waiver but will wait until the major projects, particularly the systems upgrades, are completed.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

The Division of Welfare made several organizational and administrative changes since 2002. At this time, the state leadership focused on improving the customer experience, particularly case processing times, while having fewer staff and resources. One of the key priorities for organizational change was restructuring the lines of communication so new systems, service models, and policies would be implemented consistently across field offices. State-level staff also emphasized the importance of a corresponding shift from assigning management responsibilities strictly by region to a focus on program area. Another effort was to eliminate individual worker caseloads and change to a task-based approach. Under this newly implemented system, there is only one statewide caseload and theoretically any caseworker in the state could "touch" a case. Caseworkers do not have their own caseload and work together to clear cases on a regular basis. Supervisors review daily reports of unresolved cases or cases that have an action needed to assign the work among the team of caseworkers. A final major organizational change in the Division of Welfare was the consolidation of the case maintenance activities for SNAP into one location serving the entire state, the Treasure Valley Processing Center, which also operates a call center (discussed further below). All aspects of recertifications and change reporting are handled at this centralized processing center.

New Service Delivery Model

The New Service Delivery model developed by the Division of Welfare was piloted prior to the summer of 2008; implementation began in June 2008 and was implemented statewide by early 2009. The new model consists of: immediately entering into a dialogue with potential applicants to improve understanding of services and application options (know as "Informed Choice"), working with applicants immediately when they walk in the door (known as "Same-day Service), letting potential applicants talk to a decision-maker when they enter a field office (known as "Decision-maker Up-front"), and managing staff in field offices so they are available to and respond to the minute-by-minute flow of potential applicants into a field office (known as "Customer Volume Management"). This model moved the state away from its more traditional methods of processing eligibility applications to improve the customer's experience and operate

more efficiently. The new service delivery model also uses new automated tools (like eVerif-I and eCaseFile) and will use the new web-based MIS once it is completed.[3]

Customers are greeted by caseworkers, not clerical staff, who are considered decision-makers at the front desk. Division of Welfare leadership indicated that it was important to have decision-makers the first point of contact. The workers ask clients preliminary questions before the customer begins the application process in order to share critical information and options available to potential applicants. This includes information about benefit programs, requirements to participate in various programs, necessary steps to participate in those programs, and other needed instructions. This up-front access to a caseworker helps to streamline the overall application process in order to improve the customer's overall experience.

The goal of Idaho's New Service Delivery model was to reduce the burden on clients and improve case processing times, ideally completing a case the day the client walks in the office to apply, which also improves accuracy. After talking with an up-front decision-maker (Informed Choice), customers may then wait to see a caseworker to apply for SNAP and other benefits without needing an appointment. Wait times to see a caseworker vary by the day of the week and time of day, but the goal is for all applicants to receive same-day service. When it is the customer's turn, the caseworker immediately begins the traditional 'eligibility interview' without the applicant filling out any paperwork. The new web-based MIS will allow the collection of demographics and related information without initiating a paper application. This new approach is called the "Focused Interview." At the end of the interview, an application form is printed and signed by the applicant. This further streamlines the application process and allows the applicant and the caseworker to complete the application quickly in one visit. In fact, most applicants now have a determination completed by the worker on the same day. This requires all elements of eligibility to be verified, either through paper verifications or by making necessary phone calls. The caseworker does the eligibility determination (supported by eVerif-I and eCaseFile) while the customer waits. Acting quickly to reach an eligibility decision has the added benefit of improving the accuracy of the eligibility determination.

Those who qualify for SNAP are provided an EBT card the same day. In most cases, cards are activated overnight with the benefits available the following morning. Recertifications are conducted by phone every six months. The process is very different from Idaho's old service delivery process, which required applicants to come into the office once to fill out the application and again to interview, and resulted in long wait times for interviews, eligibility determinations, and benefits.

Idaho worked to standardize and improve other aspects of up-front office flow as a part of the move to new service delivery. Should a customer come into the office to report a change or drop off verification documents, they are guided by the up-front caseworker to decision-makers who can quickly review and act on issues rather than waiting to see a caseworker. Idaho remodeled many of their field offices to accommodate this new flow of customers.

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[3] The new web-based MIS, called IBES, was implemented in November 2009.

Technological Innovations

Processing/Call Center

Idaho Division of Welfare now operates the Treasure Valley Processing Center, which handles all calls for the Division of Welfare's benefit programs (SNAP, TANF, state SSI payments, and childcare) for the entire state. The processing center was built during a 12-month period by incrementally phasing in phone calls and SNAP recertifications for each of the seven regions in the state. A self-directed phone tree assures that calls received by the processing center relate to programs under the Division's administration.

The processing center is staffed by both caseworkers and non-caseworkers. Caseworkers are expected to handle a variety of tasks in the processing center because the work to accomplish on any given day can vary and is distributed accordingly. The processing center has experimented with several ways to schedule recertification interviews by phone, and currently sends staggered notices to clients with a date that the client must call in to complete the interview. A pool of non-caseworkers answer general phone questions; ongoing training keep these staff informed on program-specific and more general information so that questions can be answered quickly and accurately.

Call volume varies, but was around 2,000 calls per day at the time of this review. A call-back feature holds clients' place in line and calls them back when the next worker becomes available.

Management Information System

At the time of our visit, Idaho was in the process of developing a new MIS system. As discussed above, the Division of Welfare is transferring the new system in-house using "agile software development," an approach to new product development borrowed from the private sector to make minimum changes to an MIS built and working in California. Accenture, the company that developed California's C4 MIS system on which IBES is based, consulted on the EPICS replacement project. The new system should better support many of the business process changes that the state has implemented. The planning and development process combined business process with IT concerns. Users, including caseworkers and supervisors, tested the system throughout the development process, through four "validation sessions," and, later in the process, through daily testing by selected caseworkers and supervisors. Caseworkers were given time to complete interactive online video training in the IBES system. The state conducted a pilot in a medium-sized local office in July 2009.[4]

The teams working to develop the new IBES system also created various other electronic tools to improve caseworker efficiency, customer experience and support new service delivery. These tools include the following:

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[4] The state planned to implement the new IBES system in all local offices in November 2009, and at the time of our visit, staff were preparing for the rollout.

Paperless System

eCaseFile — The department's electronic case file tool, or eCaseFile, was piloted in the Coeur d'Alene field office in the summer of 2007, and implemented statewide in 2008. The tool will continue to be used after the change to the new IBES system, and processing center staff identified electronic case files and document imaging as crucial tools enabling the smooth and efficient operation of the state's processing centers.

eEligibility—Implemented for the SNAP program in January 2007, Idaho's eEligibility tool gives caseworkers the ability to check the results of a case immediately, determining eligibility and benefit levels, processing the case and releasing benefits immediately. Prior to the introduction of the eEligibility tool, cases were processed in batches overnight, and the minimum time for eligibility determination was 48 hours. This electronic tool was designed to save caseworker time and support new service delivery. The IBES system will have these same eligibility determination capacities, so the eEligibility tool will not be used with IBES.

eVerif-I—The eVerif-I electronic tool allows staff to verify household circumstances through interfaces with other statewide automated systems, drawing data from the Idaho Department of Labor, Child Support Service, Social Security Administration and Idaho Bureau of Vital Records and Health Statistics. This system eliminates the need for caseworkers to spend time searching for applicant information on other agency systems. Caseworkers will continue to use the eVerif-I tool after the switchover to the IBES system.

Statewide Workload Management—The Statewide Workload Management, or SWM, tool reflects Idaho's efforts to look at performance from a statewide perspective. The SWM tool moved a monthly, paper performance report onto the department's network and allows administrators to access performance data in real time. Administrators and managers use the SWM tool for more accurate management. The Division's new MIS will include a new data warehouse and will build and improve on the SWM to provide even more performance and productivity tracking.

Partnering Arrangements

The Idaho Division of Welfare has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with several refugee agencies to jointly support newly arriving refugees as they apply and recertify for the SNAP program. The partnership between the Division and the resettlement agencies is quite formal; the MOU outlines rules, responsibilities, procedures, timelines, contact information, and problem solving protocol. To assist with the application process, partner refugee agencies help applicants gather their documentation, which the agency sends to the local eligibility office. A specialized caseworker will key in the case and go to the partner refugee agency with a laptop to complete the interview with the help of an agency-provided, state-funded interpreter, if necessary, and process the case. In most cases, benefits are available to the applicant the next day. For recertifications, each agency will be assigned a specific day when clients should call the call center to complete a recertification interview, using a "language line" service for interpretation. Idaho has developed trainings for caseworkers that work with refugees and other subpopulations. Additionally, each agency has an EBT CAPS machine on-site.

Navigators, a relatively new position under DHW's Child and Family Services, are responsible for assessing referred cases and referring clients along to appropriate services within the community. Caseworkers mentioned they would often refer clients experiencing multiple difficulties to the Navigators. Navigators work closely with these families to resolve barriers, using community resources and connections that will assist the families

Idaho also maintains communications the Idaho Hunger Relief Task Force, a statewide nonprofit organization representing a partnership of the University of Idaho, the Women, Infants and Children program (WIC), the Idaho Food Bank, religious organizations, and other organizations across the state. The Idaho Hunger Relief Task Force conducts research, advocacy, and conferences to affect policies relating to hunger.

Outcomes Tracked

State SNAP administrators use the SWM reports to monitor and track performance. The SWM tool tracks several outcomes, making data available on the number of applications processed, pending applications, and application processing time, at various levels including the caseworker, supervisor, manager, and local office levels.

Idaho tracks outcomes mandated by FNS and makes the collected data readily available, timely, and useful for clients in their system. State-level SNAP administrators hold weekly meetings to review performance reports and strategize ways to address any issues that arise. Throughout its modernization process, Idaho has paid particular attention to the average processing time, average days between application and dispensation, and the number of applications approved within 24 hours. Increasing the last outcome was a goal of Idaho's modernization process, and the state looks to increasing numbers of applications processed within one day as a measure of success. Additionally, staff can create customized reports from the state's MIS (old EPICS) system, although the availability of data for these reports is somewhat limited by the functionality of the system. The new MIS, as previously mentioned will increase the amount of data available in Idaho's data warehouse and will allow even greater insight into performance and productivity.

The Westgate (Boise) local office tracks interview times, although this is not standard practice across local offices. The self-directed phone tree allows the call center to track the types of incoming calls.

Challenges

Some of the contextual challenges Idaho DHW faced for implementing the service delivery model included budget holdbacks, staff furloughs, increasing caseloads, economic pressures, and IBES implementation.

Many of the challenges facing the Idaho SNAP modernization process were cultural. The modernization process changed how work is done in the local office. Although administrators and managers have worked hard to help staff adapt, some still report challenges getting staff,

particularly at the supervisor level, to buy into the changes. This has led to some turnover. At the state level, SNAP modernization efforts continue to be challenged by stigma and misconceptions surrounding SNAP and other benefits programs. Advocate partners have helped to address this issue but more collaboration with partners on this issue was identified as a need. Some clients have also been reluctant to adjust to the changes involved in modernization, and some workers report that clients miss having a dedicated caseworker.

Early on, the Treasure Valley Processing Center faced challenges related to technological glitches and a high volume of calls. Call volumes were often so high that customers could not get through, even to leave a message. However, supervisors can shift responsibilities to help manage the volume, and managers can project and plan the workload in the coming month using call data. Finally, clients have reported technical issues with the processing center's call-back feature as well as long hold times.

High volume in some local offices has also been a challenge, and state-level administrators hope to develop a standardized way to track and manage volume in local offices, and to determine if delays in processing time are office/agency or client caused.

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

Idaho's Division of Welfare has improved performance significantly in the areas targeted by SNAP modernization efforts. The state has seen a significant reduction in error rates and a large reduction in application processing time, with a significant percentage of applications being processed in one day.

State administrators see their unique planning and implementation process as a key to their program's successes. The use of "lean" business concepts to develop modernization activities allowed Idaho to begin to make changes without having the full plans or funding in place. Prioritizing explicit goals allowed Idaho to focus on the modernization efforts that would be the most effective; particularly, state administrators prioritized business process changes over policy changes. Idaho also focused on looking for incremental ways to build system capacity, such as the new eTools, instead of holding modernization up while waiting for the development of a replacement of the MIS. The state has also been very pleased with the ability of the "agile" development process to manage the development of a MIS in a timely and cost-effective manner.

State administrators also point to efforts to managing the expectations of staff and involving staff at every level into the modernization process as key to tackling cultural challenges and developing technology and business processes that are useful to caseworkers and clients. State administers made an explicit effort to "flatten" the organization by soliciting feedback from every level on the modernization process. Staff at different levels in the department participated in product development meetings and were involved in the testing of the products. This enhanced the organization's ability to increase morale, gain organizational buy-in for the changes, overcome cultural barriers to modernization, and teach staff that the improvements would not be perfect the first time. State administrators also report that involving "end users," in systems and business process development resulted in a smoother and more integrated transition between development and implementation of changes.

Finally, the implementation of New Service Delivery model was critical to increasing productivity. New Service Delivery changed the traditional system of scheduled appointments and clerical reception to a system that provides same-day service and put a decision-maker up front. State leadership has credited the reduction in wasted administrative effort and paperwork and the improvement of the applicants' experience with the system to these changes.

Future Plans

At the time of our visit, staff were focused primarily on the readiness process for the systems change, but also had several future modernization goals and plans. Future plans include: telephonic signature technology to eliminate paper in the application and recertification process; changing all households to simplified reporting; and implementing combined applications.

Division of Welfare administrators also plan to increase engagement with partners. The state would like to create more formal partnerships with hospitals, community-based organizations and food banks to help clients access a decision-maker as a way to increase program access in the community and improve productivity of staff. The state plans to explore building the technical capacity for clients to apply at partner organizations like grocery stores and nursing homes. Additionally, having training partners do some of the "informed choice" eligibility counseling would decrease burden on local offices while helping applicants with the services they want.

Idaho DHW administrators have also had preliminary conversations about implementing telecommuting for caseworkers, creating an online application, and developing a portal for clients to access information about their cases online or by phone.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
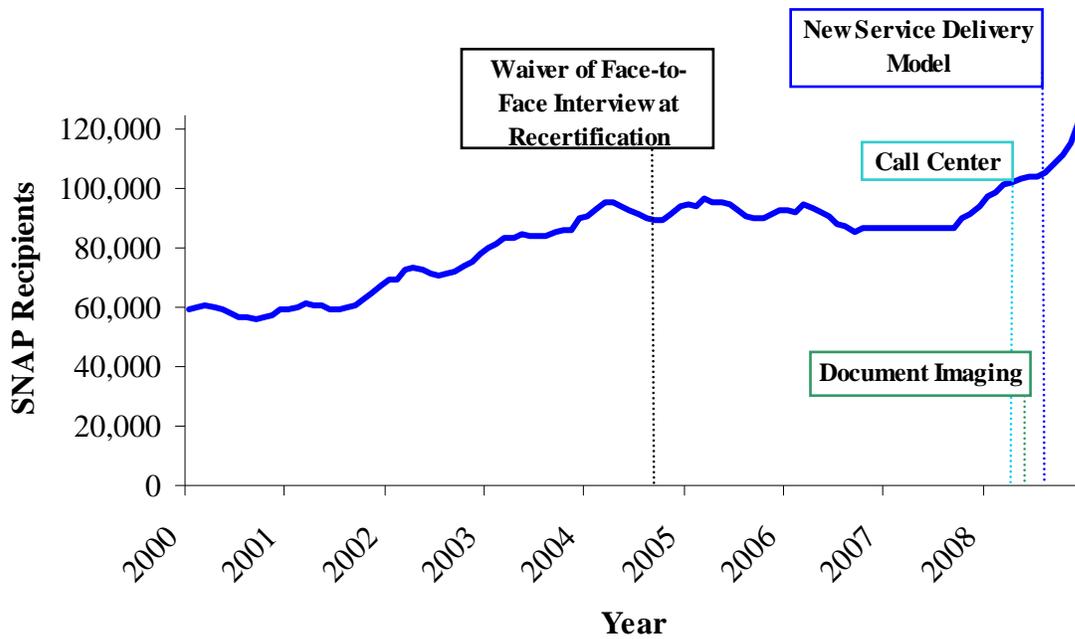
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Boise, ID (state office)
Westgate Local Office, Boise, ID (local office)
Treasure Valley Processing Center, Boise, ID (processing/call center)
May 2009

ILLINOIS CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

Illinois's efforts to modernize SNAP have focused on the functionality of its technological tools to improve customer service and worker efficiency. To do so, the state has implemented three major modernization projects. The first is an online application called Web Stamps. The second project is an automated system that conducts certain recertification interviews by phone called Phone Stamps, or the Phone System Interview (PSI). Finally, the state has developed a Food Stamp Demonstration Project called Express Stamps in partnership with several organizations. Express Stamps allows individuals to apply, be approved, and receive their first month of SNAP benefits entirely within partner food pantries.

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➢ State-Administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):**
> ➢ 1,299,443 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➢ 2008 Unemployment: 6.5%
> ➢ Increased SNAP caseloads due to two disaster programs in one year, and general economic slowdown
> ➢ Reductions in staff at administrative and local level

To support these projects, the state developed Caseworker Tools, a web-based workload management application that operates via the department's intranet. It allows supervisors and workers in local offices to access and manage case information on web applications, Express Stamps applications, and PSI recertification. These modernization projects have also necessitated several policy waivers, including electronic application filing, waiver of face-to-face interviews, and simplified reporting requirements.

Organizational Structure

The Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for the state's SNAP. Illinois DHS is divided into seven divisions, and SNAP is housed in the Human Capital Development (HCD) division. In addition to SNAP, HCD is responsible for the several other benefit programs including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and other cash assistance programs, including childcare assistance, emergency food and shelter, funeral and burial benefits, and supportive housing. In the past five years, the department has seen significant staff reduction and agency reorganization.

HCD operates 115 local offices called Family Community Resource Centers (FCRCs). The state is divided into six regions with regional directors and staff, the largest of which handles more than 79,000 cases in the southern suburbs of Chicago and has 155 staff. The FCRCs are primarily responsible for SNAP, medical assistance and cash programs. The state's medical assistance programs are overseen by the Illinois Department of Health Care and Family Services; however, these programs are administered by the FCRCs.

The state sets policy for the FCRCs and uses a statewide policy review process that allows staff at the local level to comment on draft policy changes. Employees are notified of

finalized policy changes through alerts on their networked computers, which link to the state's online policy handbook. FCRC workers are unionized managers, and policy makers work with union representatives when making both procedural and policy changes. State-level administrators also hold a monthly meeting with regional directors to apprise them of any policy changes. For major changes, the state holds more frequent meetings with the regional and the local staff and provides training materials or face-to-face trainings to local offices, as necessary. An online Policy Clarification Board provides local offices the opportunity to review policy clarifications on a monthly basis.

Service Delivery Structure

The majority of local offices, or FCRCs, in Illinois use a case management service delivery structure. Caseworkers are "general," and handle SNAP, cash, and medical cases. For the most part, caseworkers have their own caseload and handle both the initial application and recertifications. Due to two SNAP disaster programs and the worsening economy in the past year, the caseloads have increased, drastically in some offices. For example, the average caseload in one office was approximately 1,100 cases per worker.

FCRC administrators have some procedural flexibility to meet local needs, and several FCRCs have experimented with new service delivery structures. One local office implemented worker specialization and a shared caseload a few years ago. This office divides work by the type of case, with some workers doing only TANF cases, and other doing only long-term care cases; by intake and ongoing cases; and by the way that the client interacts with the office, with some workers doing only walk-ins, and others dealing with clients who apply or recertify without coming into the office.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

Several factors drove Illinois to implement SNAP modernization efforts. First, there was political and administration interest in moving away from paper and towards using technology to improve efficiency. In particular, the DHS Secretary at the time expressed a commitment to reducing wait times in local offices by moving processes online. Organizational changes, including the elimination and collapsing of certain state-level bureaus, led to a need for greater efficiency at every level, which drove SNAP modernization activities. The support of the leadership within the department has also been instrumental for obtaining approval for various changes and updates to the food stamp management information system (MIS) necessary for modernization projects. Interest in modernization by the federal government and advocates was the impetus for the development of Illinois's Express Stamps program, which allows food bank customers to apply, be approved for, and receive up to two months' worth of food stamp benefits immediately.

Key Goals and Outcomes

Leveraging technology to increase efficiency both for customers and local office staff was the main goal of the state's SNAP modernization efforts. Technological innovations like the online application and the automated recertification by phone were designed to decrease the hassle to customers involved in the application and recertification processes, while also decreasing the

workload at local offices. Another goal was to increase access to and participation in the program by identifying new access points such as the Express Stamps program. The Express Stamp program had the explicit goals of increasing access to and comfort with SNAP among those with earnings, the elderly, and immigrants.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

Planning for the Express Stamps participation project jumpstarted the modernization process in Illinois and laid the groundwork for subsequent modernization projects including the online application, Web Stamps, and the automated phone system for recertification, Phone Stamps. The impetus for the Express Stamps participation project began with a coalition organization of Feeding America (previously called America's Second Harvest) in partnership with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), the Illinois DHS, and the Northern Illinois Food Bank. Feeding America was interested in developing and testing a program that would allow individuals to apply for SNAP in food pantries, with the goals of increasing knowledge, comfort, and participation in SNAP among individuals who may not think they are eligible or those discouraged from coming into a local office to apply, such as those with earned income, the elderly, and immigrants. Interested in developing a national pilot program in one state to test the feasibility of this idea, Feeding America focused on Illinois for several reasons. First, Feeding America has a strong partnership with the Midwest FNS regional office and both are headquartered in Chicago. Additionally, Feeding America had a strong relationship with the Northern Illinois Food Bank, and trusted this organization to be a valuable partner in the participation project and to remain committed throughout the process. FNS approached the Illinois DHS leadership with the proposal to partner with Feeding America on a demonstration participation project.

Each partner brought unique and valuable resources to the table and the four organizations developed a strong working partnership. FNS brought the ability to deliver waiver requests through the USDA as well as liaison with the state SNAP administration. Feeding America functioned as an advocate, leveraging their connections in Washington, D.C., toward its interest in making the Express Stamps participation program a national pilot with the framework of increasing hungry people's access to federal nutrition programs. The state devoted resources to develop the technical capacity needed for the project, and the Northern Illinois Food Bank recruited the partner pantries and assisted with recruitment and training of Express Stamps volunteers.

A significant amount of the planning process focused on developing the shortened SNAP application that would be used in the partner food pantries. Each partner had input on the development of the application. Important issues included preserving the "pantry setting," particularly for immigrants who might be disinclined to engage with government programs; maintaining the local offices, or FCRCs, as the primary place to get services and case management; and creating an application that was short and simple enough for even a low-literacy population to understand without significant guidance. The state hired a consultant, Chicago Systems Group (CSG), to build the technology needed for the Express Stamps application, including the data bridge between the Express Stamps application and the SNAP

MIS. This "data bridge" called Caseworker Tools laid the groundwork for the development of the online SNAP application.

The bulk of the higher-level planning for Web Stamps and Phone Stamps was conducted by the Office of Strategic Planning at HCD; state-level SNAP staff in this division are primarily responsible for the implementation of these plans. The planning for the web application, Web Stamps, and the automated recertification by phone, Phone Stamps, was dominated by the process of getting internal approval for the necessary technology and systems changes. The state has a centralized management body, Centralized Management Services (CMS), which is tasked with coordinating and prioritizing hardware, information technology, and systems requests to avoid duplication among agencies and save the state money. Requests for the systems and technology changes needed for the SNAP modernization projects were generally initiated by HCD, and then passed along to the associate secretary and secretary of Illinois DHS for approval. The Secretary would then pass the request to the CMS and the Governor's Office of Management and Budget. Because this process was lengthy and involved political interests, the Secretary's support for SNAP modernization projects was important to obtaining the necessary resources and approval.

Modernization Efforts

The state's modernization activities focused primarily on the development of the Express Stamps demonstration project, the online application (Web Stamps), and the automated recertification by phone (Phone Stamps). In addition, Illinois has made several policy changes both to increase access and to facilitate other modernization efforts; developed an electronic reporting system to increase workflow management in local offices; partnered with the Chicago Public Schools to increase SNAP participation; continues to operate a statewide hotline call center for SNAP questions, and has experimented in several local offices with changes in office flow and workload management. These and other modernization efforts are detailed below.

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

Illinois has made changes to simplify policy since the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills. These policy changes have reduced workload for local staff and helped make the program less error prone.

➢ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.** In 2003, the state went from a quarterly reporting system to semiannual reporting, a change referred to as the "EZ REDE."[5] The semiannual recertification was initially only applied to the earned income population, but has since been expanded to a broader population of participants. Simplified reporting allowed the state to expand the number of cases included in simplified reporting, and add these cases to the automated phone system recertification, or Phone Stamps, project.

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[5] The Illinois SNAP program refers to recertification as "redetermination." "EZ REDE" is a shortened version of the phrase "Easy Redetermination."

> **Simplified Standard Utility Allowance.** Illinois has a mandatory standard utility allowance for SNAP participants.

> **Expanded Vehicle Exemption.** Most vehicles are excluded per state TANF rules.

> **Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview at Recertification.** The waiver of the face-to-face interview at recertification was necessary for the implementation of the Phone Stamps project.

> **Transitional Benefits to TANF leavers.** Illinois also extended five months of transitional SNAP benefits to families transitioning off the TANF program.

> **Simplified Definition of Income and Resources.** The state provides a simplified definition of both income and resources.

> **Electronic Application Filing (e-signatures accepted).** This policy is necessary for implementing the online application, Web Stamps.

> **Program Integration.** The state combined online and paper applications to cover SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid.

The state is currently working to expand categorical eligibility and to eliminate the asset test for all SNAP participants. These policy changes are also aimed at decreasing the burden on workers and applicants while increasing eligibility. In addition, the state is considering a waiver of the face-to-face interview at application to streamline the online application process.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

At the state level, Illinois has developed and implemented two electronic tools that effect the way that work is managed in local offices; at the local office level, flexibility around individual office procedures has allowed several local offices to experiment with new ways of managing work and office flow.

Caseworker Tools

Developed by consultant CSG, "Caseworker Tools" is a software application that manages cases received through Express Stamps, Phone Stamps, and Web Stamps, entering the new case information into the state's MIS and allowing managers to electronically assign these cases to caseworkers. Workers, managers, and administrators access Caseworker Tools through the HCD intranet with unique usernames and passwords, which give them varying levels of access. Workers can see only their own "Caseworker List" page, which shows the cases received through Web Stamps, Phone Stamps or Express Stamps that a manager has assigned them. Managers see the "Managers Assignment Page" when they log onto Caseworker Tools, which list all the applications and recertification interviews received electronically the previous day. The manager is then responsible for assigning cases to the workers they supervise. Local office

administrators can use Caseworker Tools to see all the cases assigned to a particular office or region. To ease the transition to Caseworker Tools in local offices, the state offered two tiers of training for staff on Caseworker Tools.

Caseworker Tools helps managers and workers manage and complete cases submitted electronically. When Caseworker Tools receives an application from Express Stamps or Web Stamps, or a recertification from Phone Stamps, the system automatically screens the case for possible eligibility, coding the case accordingly. Caseworker Tools uses the case information it receives to generate a case in the MIS, and the worker assigned the case can use the MIS to automatically schedule an interview if necessary and manually send the applicant a list of required verification documents. Applications not received electronically through Express Stamps, Web Stamps, or Phone Stamps (i.e., applications submitted at an office) are not managed in Caseworker Tools.

Electronic Reporting

The second electronic tool implemented in Illinois that effects work management in local offices is an electronic case summary and electronic reporting system. Part of effort to reduce paper, the system generates an electronic case report, or "522 Case Summary Form," when certain actions are taken on a case. Similar to Caseworker Tools, this electronic reporting system is housed on the HCD intranet and available to all local office staff. Administrators are able to access all "522s," or case reports in the state. The system also creates a monthly report with household- and participant-level data used for reporting to FNS and to inform the advocate community. The reports are also used to display the recertification forms used in centrally generated by the system.

Local-Level Changes

In addition to these statewide process reengineering sparked by Caseworker Tools and the electronic reporting system, several FCRCs have used the procedural flexibility at the local level to implement other types of organizational changes and process reengineering. One office that had implemented an "Express Desk" in the waiting area, staffed by a caseworker who could do EBT cards and changes, with the goal of reducing wait times for clients. Caseworkers staff the Express Desk in two- to three-month shifts, while the rest of the workers in the office cover their caseload. This same office made several organizational changes to adapt to the work created by the online application, including two dedicated Web Stamps workers; dedicated Web Stamps managers tasked with distributing cases received through Caseworker Tools; and five dedicated "web-days" per month, where workers work only cases from electronic applications.

In another FCRC, worker specialization and caseload sharing was implemented approximately two-and-a-half years ago. Workers do not have individual caseloads but are assigned to work either intake or ongoing cases. Work is divided again by the type of cases, with some workers handling cash assistance cases or long-term care cases; and by type of application, with some workers only handling mail-in or walk-in cases. Changes to ongoing cases are handled by a call center operated by the local office.

Technological Innovations

Call Centers

Illinois operates a statewide SNAP call center for questions and address changes, and at least one local office operates a call center for changes. The state-level call center had been in place for several years, starting as an intervention line for clients that could not get through to local office staff and subsequently evolving and adding functions. Currently, the call center uses an automated inquiry system to answer routine questions. Other functions include an office locator and benefits calculator. The only change the call center can do is a change of address. The call center refers callers to local offices and can forward voicemails to the appropriate local office through e-mail.

At least one FCRC has used the allowed procedural flexibility to implement a call center for changes. The local office implemented its call center approximately two-and-a-half years ago, following a FNS regional conference in 2006 highlighting Milwaukee and Florida's call centers. The call center was developed in concert with a shift in caseload management to a shared caseload and worker specialization. The call center is staffed by up to six caseworkers. When a client calls the office, they reach an automated attendant, with one option being "report a change." Clients who indicate that they would like to report a change are transferred to the call center, which can accept any change.

Online Application

Illinois operates a statewide online combined application for cash assistance, medical assistance, and SNAP. The online application, or Web Stamps, was first launched in late June 2007 but faced a major hardware issue and was quickly taken down. It was available again starting in January 2009, with more than 49,000 applications submitted online in the first several months. The online application is available through a link on the DHS web site. Applicants create a username and password and can use this logon to return to unfinished applications for up to 15 days. The first page of the online application includes links to the state's online eligibility calculator, more information about different benefits programs, and the option to print a paper version of the application. Additionally, at any point in the application, users can switch from the English to the Spanish version of the application.

As use of Web Stamps increased, the state-level SNAP staff notified partner community organizations, apprising them of the newly available tool and asked them to help their clients apply online. A question towards the front of the application asks, "Are you applying for someone else?" allowing family members or community-based organization staff to fill out the online application on the applicant's behalf. When submitted, the information from the online application populates the MIS and is assigned by zip code to a local office through the Caseworker Tools system. Caseworkers in the local office follow up with online applications, contacting the applicant for a face-to-face or phone interview and sending the applicant a list of the necessary verification documents.

Automated Phone Interview System

The Phone System Interview (PSI), also called Phone Stamps, allows certain SNAP recipients to complete a recertification interview through an automated phone system. Phone Stamps was implemented in July 2008 and is targeted at earned income SNAP recipients. The project goals include reducing the reporting burden on working SNAP recipients who might have difficulty taking time off in order to recertify at a local office, where travel and wait times can be long. Additionally, Phone Stamps was intended to reduce the interview burden on caseworkers.

The Phone Stamps system is fully automated with scripted voice response and is accessed through a toll-free number, available 24 hours a day, everyday, from any phone. Selected SNAP recipients receive a notice in the mail, which contains the date range that they may use the system. If due for a mail-in redetermination, the notice also contains: an actual mail-in recertification application, which the client can mail in recertification documents if they miss the phone date; a page of instructions for using Phone Stamps; and a worksheet completed with the client's current case information as retrieved from the electronic case reporting system. Clients are instructed to review the worksheet, noting any changes before the call. The automated interview involves confirming or making changes to the current case information as listed on the worksheet. The targeted duration of the Phone Stamps interview is eight minutes, and clients can stop an interview and call back at any time within the same day to complete the interview. At any time during the interview, saying "help," gives more details on the question. A client access number and password starts the individualized interview process and serves as an electronic signature for the recertification application. At the end of the recertification interview, clients are given the option of completing a brief demographic and customer feedback survey. Phone Stamps is available in both English and Spanish.

Once the interview is complete, it is saved and stored electronically through Caseworker Tools, and the information is populated into the MIS. The caseworker assigned to the case will review the recertification, and release a notice to the client of any necessary verification documents.

Hardware Upgrades

Illinois has also implemented a hardware upgrade, equipping all caseworkers with dual monitors. The dual monitors were implemented following the DHS Secretary's site visit to Florida, and are intended to increase caseworker efficiency.

Partnering Arrangements

Express Stamps

The Express Stamps program, allows clients to apply to SNAP in selected partner food pantries, through a shortened application administered by a food bank volunteer. Express Stamps was developed through a partnership among the Illinois DHS, Feeding America, FNS, and the Northern Illinois Food Bank. The project began in October 2006 in five partner pantries and had

increased to 10 partner pantries in five Illinois counties by June 2009. The SNAP applications are administered in the pantries by volunteers. Volunteers receive a half-day of Express Stamps training, offered at first by DHS staff and later by the Northern Illinois Food Bank staff. The application is housed on the DHS intranet and accessed securely by in-pantry volunteers on laptops provided by Feeding America.

The Express Stamps application is designed to be simple and brief so an applicant could complete it with minimal assistance. However, in practice, Express Stamps volunteers walk through the application and typically enter in data for applicants. The only verification required on the Express Stamps application is identification; other requirements include a valid Social Security number and residence in one of the counties participating in the Express Stamps demonstration project. Besides verifying identity, the application accepts self-declaration of eligibility after volunteers review an up-front list of eligibility requirements with applicants. Pantries usually distribute this list of eligibility requirements, so clients can check for basic eligibility before they begin the application process. The application continues with simplified questions about household members, earned and unearned income, assets, and housing and utility costs to determine benefit levels. The application process generally takes between 15 and 45 minutes, depending mostly on the number of members in the applicants' household. Similar to Web Stamps, the Express Stamps application can be switched from English to Spanish at any point.

After eligibility is determined, the volunteer issues the applicant an EBT card. Eligible applicants receive one month's benefits if they apply before the 15th of the month, and two months' benefits if they apply after the 15th. Applicants will receive a PIN number in the mail in several days and can then access benefits. After issuing the EBT card, the Express Stamps volunteer is finished with the case. They submit the application electronically through Express Stamps, which notifies Caseworker Tools and registers the case in the MIS. Express Stamps cases are assigned to caseworkers at the appropriate local office. The caseworkers are then responsible for notifying applicants that they must reapply after the initial Express Stamps trial period at the local office. The "reapplication" process involves the full SNAP application.

Other Partnering Arrangements

Illinois DHS maintains a partnership with the Illinois Food Bank Association and a number of area community-based organizations. IDHS communicated with these organizations when Web Stamps was released, asking them to encourage and help their clients apply for benefits online. A clause in the contract with pantries in the emergency food program requires the emergency pantries to have SNAP application available.

Illinois DHS has partnered with the Chicago Public School (CPS) system, supporting CPS's efforts to place dedicated SNAP outreach workers in targeted low-income schools to increase awareness of SNAP and to help parents complete mail-in applications.

Outcomes Tracked

For its three major modernization initiatives, Illinois is tracking outcomes for customers and system performance. For its regular reports (a stipulation of the FNS waiver), Illinois tracks many outcomes of the Express Stamps program including applications submitted, approved and denied; number of people and households receiving benefits; total and average benefit amounts; reasons for denials; and characteristics of applicants (e.g., earned income, elderly, and immigrant participants).

Express Stamps outcomes were tracked using other data sources. A quality control review of selected Express Stamps cases determined the dollar error rate, the reasons for errors, the number of cases issued correctly, and the dollar amount issued incorrectly. A customer survey of approved Express Stamps applicants tracked program accessibility and user opinions, and included questions about SNAP awareness, reasons for not applying to SNAP in the past, impression of the Express Stamps program and plans to apply for ongoing benefits at the local office.

Illinois DHS has also produced reports on Phone Stamps. Outcomes tracked to date include number of households offered the phone system option and number of households completing the PSI. To assess the extent to which Phone Stamps is allowing working SNAP recipients to recertify in a way that does not interfere with work, Illinois DHS also tracks the number of calls completed during holidays, weekends and after normal business hours. A quality control review as well as an Accuracy Counts Everyday review examines Phone Stamps error rates. Illinois DHS has an optional customer survey at the completion of the PSI asking respondents demographic information, convenience, ease of use, willingness to use Phone Stamps again, and ease of understanding PSI questions.

The Caseworker Tools system tracks web applications, allowing administrators to see the number of online applications submitted at the state, local and caseworker level. Because Caseworker Tools registers incoming applications by what the applicants appear to qualify for, Administrators can also use the system to determine the types of applications are being submitted.

Challenges

The most significant challenges that Illinois has faced as it has implemented SNAP modernization activities are related to systems infrastructure and hardware issues. The state's MIS system was developed in the 1960s and 1970s and was not designed to support the kinds of changes the state has made. There has been conversation at the state-level about developing a new MIS system that would encompass all benefit programs, but several layers of internal approval and dedicated resources would be necessary before this project got off the ground. The state has found that it is necessary to communicate early and often with the end users of systems—the local office staff—to anticipate and identify systems inefficiencies. The state also has MIS monitors in the field to help local offices troubleshoot technical issues.

Many of the challenges facing the three main SNAP modernization efforts in Illinois were systems related, but each technology faced other distinct issues. At first, Express Stamps had a relatively high error rate, in part because of applicant confusion over several screens in the application. Changes to the wording in this part of the application, increased Express Stamps volunteer training and a new earnings "summary sheet" that applicants recheck at the end of the application have been implemented to address this issue. There is some state-level frustration with the focus on program error rates at federal level; administrators believe that the bulk of the Express Stamp error rate can be explained by applicant confusion and mistakes as opposed to fraud. Additional questions in the Express Stamps application about the applicant's employment information would simplify the quality control and error reporting process. The Express Stamps program has dealt with several other technical glitches such as security software that would sign volunteers off the system at regular intervals and Express Stamps recipients receiving the incorrect PIN number and not being able to access their benefits at the grocery store.

The interaction between the Express Stamp program and the local offices has also created several challenges. During the development of the program, state SNAP administrators had to work closely with the caseworkers' union to make it clear that the Express Stamps volunteers were not taking work from caseworkers. When the program started some local office staff had not heard of Express Stamps and were confused when Express Stamps applicants came into the local office to reapply. Although effusive about the Express Stamps program, advocates and clients still report traditional issues in the local offices, including unhelpful and overworked staff, long waits and transportation issues, once Express Stamps recipients reapply.

The bulk of the challenges to the functionality of the online application are technology- and systems-based. A significant issue has been the number of applications that the system is unable to classify or determine the programs for which the applicant might be eligible. These "suspended" cases cause extra work for caseworkers since they have to contact and interview the applicant to classify and process the case. One local office had two designated workers processing these unassigned cases from the web application. The organization of cases in Caseworker Tools also creates extra work for managers and workers. Worker's lists of cases they are responsible for processing are organized by case number, making them time consuming to find; completed cases are not cleared from the workers "to do" list, and assigned cases are not cleared from manager's lists. In addition, some cases do not transfer from the web application to the MIS; and the system in general runs very slowly. A state-level workgroup has been formed to address issues with Web Stamps' interaction with the system.

Local offices also struggled with the release of the online application because of the increased volume in applications coming into the office. Additionally, local offices had issues with clients submitting multiple applications online; because local office staff must act on every application, this causes additional work for managers and caseworkers. Thus, some clients who might qualify for expedited service are not getting contacted within the two-day window after the submission of their online application, as indicated on the online application.

Challenges with the Phone Stamps recertification system include clients thinking that the finishing the interview ends the recertification process and being confused when they receive a follow-up verification notice, and clients mailing in a recertification application in addition to

completing the Phone Stamps interview. To address these issues, the state is editing the Phone Stamps mailing to make the process more clear. Additionally, state-level administrators stress the importance of more detailed reporting on the Phone Stamps program, to help both the state and local levels better understand and administer the program.

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

Illinois state SNAP administrators are pleased with what they see as their modernization efforts increasing access to SNAP. State SNAP administrators attribute some of that success to their careful and thorough process of developing the scripts for Phone Stamps and the questions for Web Stamps and Express Stamps.

Both Phone Stamps and Express Stamps are innovative and unique programs that Illinois staff believe can serve as national demonstration projects. Both have received positive feedback from SNAP recipients and applicants as indicated in customer satisfaction surveys.

The Express Stamp program, in particular, is an innovative and well-received program. State SNAP administrators and advocates believe that Express Stamps has begun to achieve its goal of increasing access to SNAP among the immigrant population; non-citizen Express Stamps applications have gone up. The participation program has been particularly well received among Illinois advocates and agencies, which hope that the program will expand.

For these efforts, the state staff stressed the need to ensure that the technological improvements can be supported by the current systems. A great deal of coordination between the state and consultant technology staff was needed for the successful implementation of the three modernization efforts developed. In addition, local office staff needed more communication and training on these efforts to avoid confusion and backlogs over cases that were initiated through Web Stamps and Express Stamps. Program staff also stressed the importance of sufficient and quality training for in-pantry volunteers, to get the mostly older volunteer staff comfortable with the technology and the system.

Future Plans

In the near-term, Illinois has several plans to continue with current modernization activities. At the time of the visit, the state had planned to roll out two additional Express Stamps pantries in the Cook County-Chicago area, with a corresponding expansion of the evaluation of the demonstration project. The state also hopes to expand the Phone Stamps program to a larger pool of SNAP recipients. Planned policy changes include expanding categorical eligibility, waiver of the face-to-face interview at intake, and a child support deduction change, all intended to increase program access. A policy change that would drop the SNAP asset test is going through a rules change process in the Joint Committee on Legislative Review.

Illinois also has several longer-termed goals for continued modernization of SNAP. There are conversations at the state-level about a new MIS that would address current systems issues

and possibly encompass all benefit programs. The state has also discussed an electronic signature for the online application and revisiting the document imaging/electronic case files project.

Illinois has also looked into document imaging and electronic case files and operated a small 2003 pilot project in Chicago. The project is on hold, but the state plans to hire a business analyst to "get the project back on track," and make these changes in the most efficient manner possible.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
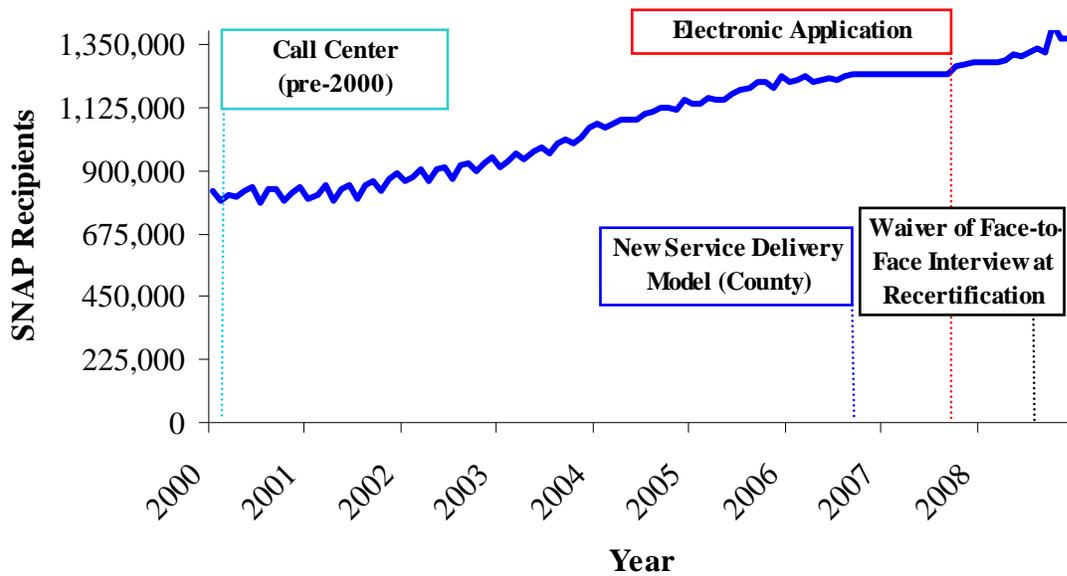
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Human Capital Development, Bureau of Policy Development, Springfield, IL (state office)
Northern Family Community Resource Center, Skokie, IL (local office)
Belleville Family Community Resource Center, Belleville, IL (local office, telephone interviews)
June 2009

INDIANA CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

In 2007, Indiana entered into a contract with IBM to privatize much of SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid operations in the state. In doing so,

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➢ State-Administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):**
> ➢ 623,415 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➢ 2008 Unemployment: 5.9%

they created a call center, instituted online applications, implemented document imaging, IVR, and restructured many of the program's administrative functions.

Organizational Structure

The Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) is comprised of five divisions or offices. The Division of Family Resources (DFR) is responsible for eligibility determination for SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, and childcare. DFR also administers the state's childcare licensing and inspection program. Other divisions within FSSA include the Office of Medicaid Policy and Planning, the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services, the Division of Mental Health and Addiction, and the Division of Aging.

SNAP operations are privatized throughout the state and SNAP is administered through a combination of 108 County Family Resource Offices in 92 counties and five Service Centers. The counties are divided into eight regions, five of which are "modernized" and have a Service Center that processes applications and other client services over the phone or work received from the document imaging center. The Grant County Service Center also houses the state's centralized document imaging operations. Within each "modernized" region, there are vendor-operated County Family Resource Offices (managed by Arbor Education and Training) and state-run offices. Non-modernized regions only have state-run offices and do not have Service Centers.

Each of the state's eight regions is administered by a regional manager. State Eligibility Managers (SEMs) oversee State Eligibility Consultants (SECs) who determine SNAP eligibility. There are no clerks at the state level. Arbor Education and Training staff are responsible for the other local office functions, including clerical and data gathering tasks, in vendor-operated offices. Within the modernized regions, client flow and application processing are identical in both Arbor-run and state-run offices.

The five Service Centers are operated by ACS and are not open to clients. They house both vendor staff and state-employed SECs. Applicants calling the Service Center can begin the application process over the phone. Applications are then mailed to applicants for completion and signature.

Residents in 59 "modernized" counties are strongly encouraged to apply for services online or by telephone. In 33 non-modernized counties in northern and central Indiana, residents continue to apply for services through their local County Family Resource Office.

Service Delivery Structure

Workers in the five modernized regions of the state no longer carry a caseload; rather they use a Workflow Management System (WFMS) and simply work the next task that drops down in the system-generated workflow queue. A task-based model is used for eligibility determination and ongoing case management. Workers in the non-modernized regions of the state continue to carry caseloads.

In modernized counties, there are two types of offices: "Arbor offices" and state managed offices. In "Arbor offices," potential applicants are assisted with filing online applications. If the client qualifies for expedited processing or otherwise requests an in-office interview, the initial "data gathering" is performed by employees of Arbor Education and Training—a for-profit provider of employment education, training, and counseling services. State employees called State Eligibility Consultants (SECs) handle eligibility determination (authorization and certification). In state-managed offices, state employees provide all in-person data gathering and eligibility services.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

Cost savings and improved customer access were the primary motivations behind the state's effort to privatize and modernize SNAP in Indiana. In addition, the state wanted to standardize operations across counties. Prior to modernization and privatization each county made its own assumptions and tailored program operations accordingly.

Key Goals or Outcomes

As noted above, cost savings and improved customer access were the primary goals of privatization and modernization in Indiana. In addition, the state wanted to standardize operations across counties.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

A core group of state-level staff worked with IBM and the coalition of vendors to design and implement the state's dramatic change in the way SNAP benefits are certified and administered. The first stage was to privatize the majority of the state's SNAP workforce in March 2007. The Grant Service Center, including one of the state's centralized document imaging, data, and voice operations, opened in October 2007. In March 2008, the state rolled out "modernization" in the next set of counties followed by additional counties in May 2008. Each roll-out coincided with the opening of two mini Service Centers (Vigo and Clark in March and Vanderburgh and Allen in May). Fifty-nine counties and nearly one-third of the state's caseload were modernized. Further roll out to the state's remaining 33 counties was delayed indefinitely.

As part of the conversion to privatization, the state interviewed and hired eight Regional Managers who then hired State Eligibility Managers (SEMs). Eighteen State Eligibility Consultants (SECs) were hired to report to each of the SEMs. As a result, some staff were reclassified and retrained. Other staff were given the opportunity to interview for positions with the vendors who were assuming the bulk of the SNAP certification and recertification tasks. The state worked to ensure that all state employees who were hired by a vendor were guaranteed similar or better salaries and benefits than when employed by the state.

Modernization Efforts

In 2006, the state entered into a 10-year, $1.16 billion contract with IBM to "modernize" the state's system for delivering SNAP, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Under this system, the state contracts out many administrative functions and processes to private vendors and state employees retain responsibility for final eligibility determination, including the eligibility interview. This also significantly altered the application process and workflow and included the implementation of new technology, including an online application, centralized call centers, and document imaging.

In 2007, approximately 70 percent of state employees were transferred to vendor agencies. Vendor staff serve as "data gatherers" while state merit staff review the information, conduct the eligibility interview, and determine eligibility. The new system was pilot tested in October 2007 in a 12-county region with plans to roll out to the rest of the state in three additional phases.

Applicants in the "modernized" regions are strongly encouraged to apply for and manage their SNAP benefits via the call center or online. The state also accepts and processes verification materials through a central document imaging center. The pilot counties retain a local office, though smaller in size than before modernization.

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

➢ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.**

➢ **Simplified Standard Utility Allowance.**

➢ **Standard Self-Employment Deduction.**

➢ **Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview at Initial Certification and at Recertification.**

➢ **Expanded Vehicle Exemption.**

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

Indiana has moved to a system designed to increase customer access by allowing applicants to apply for SNAP benefits in myriad ways: Request and start an application by phone (Service Centers are open from 7 am to 7 pm weekdays), by Internet (24 hours/day), by mail, by fax, through a community agency (see V-CAN discussion below), or through their local office. Local offices have computers to access the online application and allow clients to check the status of their cases, and telephones that ring directly at the Service Center.

The Division of Family Resources has a mobile unit, or van (DFRv), that travels throughout the state. The van serves as a fully functional FSSA office and is staffed by case managers who can process applications and approve benefits for SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid. The agency's web site provides information about the van's schedule and location.

As part of their efforts to privatize and modernize, the state completely reengineered the SNAP application and recertification process. IBM built a new system, WFMS, in conjunction with the state's system of record, ICES.

Client flow dramatically changed under privatization. Under the modernized system, households can apply for SNAP benefits via the Internet, telephone, fax, or mail. Applicants can apply for benefits by completing an online screening and application, request an application to be mailed to them either by calling from their home, or at a local office by contacting the Call Center. Applicants can also apply at a local DFR office using a computer, a paper application, or an in-person interview. Applicants are strongly encouraged to use any method other than an in-person interview to submit an application.

Applicants and clients are strongly discouraged from coming to the office. In "modernized" counties, applicants are encouraged to apply on line or by phone. If they come to the local office, they are encouraged to apply by phone (in the office) or by computer (in the office). The preference is for them to complete an online application. If they choose to call, a Call Center employee screens them. Call Center personnel send a customized application to the applicant's home. Alternatively, local office staff can begin an online application with the applicant. If the application is complete online at the local office, front desk staff review the application. If the applicant appears eligible for expedited SNAP benefits, an appointment for data gathering (i.e., the initial interview) is scheduled with an ES (most are not former state employees). Expedited appointments are preferably scheduled within four days, but always within seven days. Walk-in appointments are fit in between scheduled appointments. If the application is for non-expedited benefits, the image is scanned and sent to the Service Center and an appointment notice for a telephone data gathering and interview is mailed out.

If data gathering (i.e., the initial interview) is done in the local office, applicants are taken to the SEC once it is completed. SEC's schedules are set ahead of time so they know how many clients they will see each day. If a client walks in, he or she goes on a list and waits for the next available SEC. If data gathering occurs by phone, it is scheduled through the Service Center (i.e., call center).

During the meeting with the SEC, he or she reviews the applicant's rights and responsibilities and verifies some information (typically the pieces of information that cause errors), but more often than not the SEC will review the entire case. The SEC then puts the case in "review mode" and uses the Interactive SEC Interview Guide to verify the information gathered by the data gatherer and reviews the applicant's budget. The SEC then uses WFMS to develop the pending verification notice. If the client has an EBT card, the SEC can activate it. Otherwise it will be sent by mail.

If an ES at the Service Center is conducting a data gathering by phone that includes non-expedited SNAP benefits, a warm transfer to an SEC is attempted. If there is no SEC available to accept the transferred call to complete the review and pending verification notice, the client can request a morning "AM" or afternoon "PM" callback. The ES creates a task for the call back and at some point an SEC will call the client. After two callback attempts within a 10-minute period, the SEC proposes closure for failure to keep an appointment.

Recertifications are not typically done face-to-face. If a client does not have a phone the client is scheduled to come to the office for recertification and uses an office telephone in the lobby or resource room to fulfill a phone appointment. The client is first interviewed by an ES who then routes the call to an SEC. The SEC reviews the documents and does the rest of the interview by phone.

If an expedited application is approved through the Service Center, the SEC from the service center may call the client's local office and arrange for the client to produce identification at the local office to have the case authorized.

When SECs are not conducting client interviews, they pick up "tasks" that are worker or system generated including State Review and Eligibility Tasks generated by the vendor for review.

In the state-run offices (i.e., those that have not converted to "new solutions," state workers are responsible for all aspects of the case. Initial data gathering is not done prior to the eligibility interview. They do, however, encourage applicants to do their interviews by phone). For call back interviews, the interactive interview has not been done. Workers review the files before calling applicants. If workers cannot reach applicants by phone for the call, they leave a message telling them approximately when they will call back. If they are not reached on the second attempt, the case is denied.

The basic workflow model has five steps:

1. contractor staff reviews the application
2. contractor staff conducts basic data gathering, typically through a telephone interview with the client
3. a State Eligibility Consultant completes the eligibility interview, typically by phone
4. contractor staff review verification document and send the case to an SEC for case authorization

5.   the SEC authorizes the case

Each case transaction has anywhere from 4 to 14 tasks, depending on the case.

In 2007 the state entered into a $1.16 billion contract with IBM as the prime vendor. Subcontractors of IBM handle many aspects of SNAP application processing, including call centers, document imaging, and many of the local office operations, including data gathering and screening for benefits. IBM takes responsibility for business innovation, system analysis, etc.

New offices were either built or remodeled to accommodate the new staffing patterns.

Technological Innovations

Indiana implemented a range of technological innovation, including call centers with IVR, document imaging (both scanning of paper documents and imaging of faxes).

Call Centers and Service Center

The state has implemented one major Service Center and four mini Service Centers. The Call Centers' Intake Consultants are responsible for telephone prescreening, general inquiries, and appointment rescheduling. Eligibility Specialists respond to change reports, case specific inquiries, complaints stemming from interactions with intake consultants, and fraud reports. Another group of Eligibility Specialists perform outbound data gathering calls for applications and redeterminations and then transfer them to SECs who do the eligibility interview and determination. Additional groups of Eligibility Specialists are responsible for change processing.

Electronic Applications and Online Tools

Along with WFMS, the state implemented an online screening tool and application. After completing the online application, applicants must either print and sign it or have it mailed to them for signature and submission. An application is not date stamped until it is returned to FSSA with a signature. An electronic signature enhancement was released in spring 2009.

Paperless System

Indiana moved to a nearly paperless system. Many new applications and recertifications are paperless, with the exception of redetermination summaries. The state scans all paper documents. Existing files were not converted to electronic files and applicants have the option to print and submit paper applications.

Documents that are mailed and scanned, faxed, or imaged in a local office come to one central hub. Documents are reviewed for quality, categorized, and some data is captured from them. This data then goes into the main Service Center. After being scanned, documents are sent to a queue to be worked by an ES.

Paper files were shipped to a central location for storage and were not converted to an electronic format. ICES continues to be the system of record. If documents have been recorded

in ICES, clients do not have to provide it again. Only new applications and recertifications are converted to an electronic format.

The state implemented a new MIS and installed all new hardware as part of its modernization efforts. The state plans to add kiosks to local offices. The kiosks will have scanning and faxing capability and will also allow applicants to check the status of their application. ICES, the state's legacy system, remains the system of record.

Partnering Arrangements

IBM secured subcontracts with several firms, including ACS, Arbor Education and Training, Crowe, Haverstick, Phoenix Data Corp., Post Masters, Gravitant, Cúram Software, Interactive Intelligence, and RCR Technology Corp. The vendors are responsible for all aspects of operating the call centers, document imaging, case management, etc. State employees continue to be responsible for eligibility determination. At the time of privatization, many state employees converted to being ACS employees. Supervisors and other staff under the state system were interviewed and chosen for SEC positions and State Eligibility Manager positions (SEMs). The remaining staff were given the option to interview to become ACS or Arbor employees.

The state has developed a Voluntary Community Assistance Network (V-CAN) made up of close to 1500 organizations, including community action agencies, food banks, health centers, hospitals, and a variety of other community-based organization, that can provide information about and access to the SNAP application process. V-CAN agencies can participate in one of three levels: informational, referral, and "access point." Those that are access points can either be "publicized" access points (and are listed on the FSSA web site as a location clients can visit to apply for or manage their benefits) or "non-publicized" access points that provide assistance only to their clients.

Outcomes Tracked

As part of their agreement with FNS, FSSA developed six monthly oversight reports to track key variables as the state modernized SNAP. These reports focus on processing timeliness. In addition, the state tracks data related to call center and document imaging operations.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges for the state was designing a system with no pre-existing model. Staff struggled to design the system in a new environment. Even with extensive testing, it took several months to eliminate bugs in the system. In addition, there were "pseudo" problems after implementation — people were not sure what was supposed to happen under different scenarios. For example, how do you do a phone interview with an applicant who does not have a phone?

There is also a political environment surrounding privatization. The governor rescinded an executive order to unionize and the state had to work closely with FNS to gain approval.

The switch to privatization was a dramatic change for staff, both in terms of structure and job responsibilities. Many managers were converted to SECs but no longer supervised other employees. Many state employees became ACS employees, which resulted in stressful relationships between individuals who were no longer colleagues. The tension is compounded by different employers being co-located in a single office, each with its own personnel policies (e.g., mandatory overtime and dress code). In addition, many people were fearful that they were going to lose their jobs.

State employees expressed concerns that the data gatherers (i.e., ES) were not knowledgeable enough about SNAP policies to conduct data gathering appointments and process cases. This led them to complete a full interview with all applicants even though they had previously provided information through a data gathering interview, thereby duplicating efforts.

Staff also noted that tasks sit too long before being processed. Sometimes documents are entered but nobody creates a task for the SEC to review the new documents. This may result in a case being closed for failure to provide documents.

Data gatherers did not receive sufficient training and are not knowledgeable about the complex policies governing SNAP eligibility. As one experienced worker noted, "bad data in equals bad data out." Clients are repeatedly given inaccurate information about their cases and their eligibility.

Documents are not always labeled correctly so many SECs open every document to make sure they know which verification materials have been submitted by an applicant.

Everybody who touches a case puts comments into the electronic file. Workers must review all of the case notes to understand the crux of the case. This can be very time consuming for workers.

Clients complained bitterly about being on hold with the Call Center for extended periods. Often, clients who come to the local office have been kept on hold with the Call Center for an extended period of time and are very upset. The AM/PM callback process is also problematic. Clients are not given appointment times, rather they are told that at some point in the near future an SEC will call them.

The state's application processing rate continued to be problematic throughout their experience with privatization. In October 2009, after numerous complaints about mishandled cases and errors, and problems with timeliness (including a backlog of applications, redeterminations, and changes), the state removed IBM from the privatization arrangement as of December 15, 2009, and is in the process of negotiating contracts with the other vendors. The state plans to continue with the current arrangement for certifying and recertifying SNAP applications while piloting a "hybrid" solution. However, there is continued pressure from outside entities to remove many of the other contractors from the administering of SNAP, TANF and Medicaid services in Indiana.

In 2008, FSSA delayed modernization roll out to the state's remaining 33 counties at the

request of FNS. Due to widespread complaints about mishandling of cases, inappropriate case denials, and backlogs of applications, recertifications, and reported changes, the state canceled its contract with IBM effective December 15, 2009.

"In January 2007, before the IBM system was rolled out, the portion of food-stamp cases that were mishandled was 4.38 percent. By January 2009, that number had shot up to 18.2 percent."[6]

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

The modernized system has opened up new channels to apply for SNAP benefits—the Internet as well as requesting an application by telephone. The paperless system and document imaging were touted by most staff. It dramatically reduced the amount of paper they had to store and sort through. The state noted that if they had not privatized, they could not have found the financial resources to change the business processes and enhance technology.

According to administrators, some staff and clients prefer the new system. Staff noted that document imaging and electronic case files have improved the way they process cases.

The state noted it would have benefited from a longer pilot period, thereby allowing it more time to work out the difficulties encountered. It also recommended "flattening" the complaint procedure so clients and applicants can reach an experienced customer service staff member more quickly.

More training is needed, particularly on the system and on SNAP policy. Data gathers should be more knowledgeable about SNAP policies and procedures.

Future Plans

Expansion of the state's modernization efforts were halted in January 2009, with 59 of the state's 92 counties modernized. In October 2009, the state announced it would cancel its contract with IBM. The state plans to develop a "hybrid" structure that retains some elements of modernization, including a paperless system and privately-employed data gatherers. Applicants and clients due for redeterminations will have more opportunities to meet face-to-face with state-employed workers in local offices and have their actions processed in local office. The data gatherers will also be overseen by state employees, including Regional Managers who will have responsibility for all day-to-day operations in their respective regions.

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[6] Source: Indy.com July 8, 2008. Will Higgins Star Staff.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
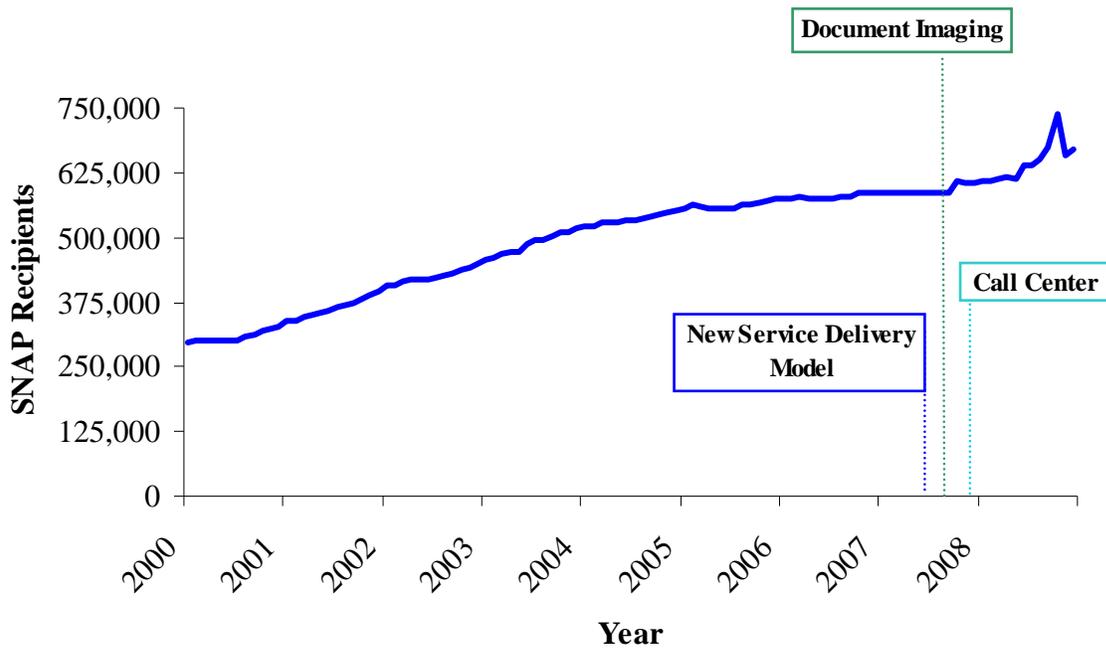
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Family and Social Services Administration, Division of Family Resources, Indianapolis, IN (state office)
Grant County Family Resource Office, Marion, IN (local office)
Blackford County Family Resource Office, Hartford City, IN (local office)
Grant County Service Center, Marion, IN (call center and document imaging operations)
March 2009

KANSAS CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

Although Kansas has not initiated a comprehensive, formal modernization program like some states, a number of key modernization activities directly affecting the Food Assistance Program have been implemented in recent years.[7] These new efforts primarily were designed to improve customer service, but they also address budget cuts and staff reductions affecting delivery of services for all public benefits programs. These activities include development and refinement of a multi-program online application, online policy manuals, placement of intake workers at multiple key community locations, and establishment of an extensive network of partnerships with businesses and multiple community partners to increase customer access.

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➢ State-Administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):**
> ➢ 187,569 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➢ 2008 Unemployment: 4.4%
> ➢ Hiring freeze
> ➢ Economic downturn
> ➢ Budget cuts
> ➢ Differences in service population demographics and needs across state

Organizational Structure

Kansas's Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services' (SRS) Economic and Employment Support Program administers the Food Assistance Program as well as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), General Assistance (GA), childcare, Head Start, medical assistance and Refugee Assistance. There are six regional offices that oversee operations in 45 local offices, or service centers, providing services to Kansas's 105 counties.

As a state-administered program, the state office sets all policies and regulations and provides guidance to the local SRS service centers, but local offices have flexibility in setting up their organizational structure and developing specific procedures for processing applications and delivering services. State staff meet regularly to discuss the potential effects of proposed policy changes across the various programs administered by the agency. Because federal SNAP guidelines are generally less flexible, staff reported they typically drive policy decisions for other programs such as TANF.

Service Delivery Structure

There is some diversity as to how caseloads and tasks are distributed across the 45 SRS service centers due to regional differences in the size and demographics of the customer base and staff capacity. Generally, workers handle both intake and ongoing tasks for assigned cases, particularly in smaller offices in rural areas of Western Kansas. At the time of the site visit, the

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[7] SNAP is called the Food Assistance Program in Kansas.

Wichita SRS office had just completed a pilot and was switching to a new strategy to address recent increases in the Food Assistance caseload. Under the new approach, some workers handling cases for families with children were reassigned to perform only intake functions as part of an effort to provide better customer service by ensuring that new customers are seen within 30 minutes and by speeding up processing time. Under the new system, staff pass the cases on to other workers after eligibility is determined to do recertification reviews and other ongoing tasks. Workers in Wichita are also being encouraged to conduct more telephone interviews as part of the effort to address the workload but staff reported that the majority are still conducted in person. Staff assigned to work with families handle Food Assistance, TANF, childcare, and medical assistance programs.

Kansas used $180,000 in ARRA funds to address increases in the Food Assistance caseload by hiring temporary staff to perform intake functions for new applicants. Most of the temporary hires were either retired SRS staff or temporary staff who had been hired to perform tasks related to LIHEAP between and January and March.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

Modernization activities in Kansas have been motivated by the need to address budget cuts and limited financial and staff resources and to find ways to improve customer services within these constraints. The impetus for the majority of the changes comes from within the agency itself, tasked by its Secretary with "trying to do business smarter with fewer resources." Faced with major budget cuts in 2002, a decision was made to consolidate local offices, shifting from a program presence in every county (106 offices) to only 45 local SRS service centers. Looking for a way to compensate for this loss of access for many customers, Kansas developed and launched an online application and created a Community Collaboration initiative—a network of partnerships with community organizations to provide hundreds of new "Access Points" for services. Staff felt that these changes were motivated by a need to "do business differently" and more efficiently by "reaching people more effectively." Concerns expressed by community partners regarding potential customers' access to services are also a driving force for the modernization efforts implemented. Staff noted that SRS's recognition that they could not adequately meet the needs of all their customers led to the community collaborations.

Key Goals or Outcomes

The key goals for modernization efforts in Kansas are to increase customer access, to improve customer service, and to increase participation while conducting work more efficiently. Secondary goals noted include improving timeliness and accuracy.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

In addition to regular meetings with program administrators, an Implementation Planning Team comprised of regional representatives meets monthly to discuss program changes, variations in implementation plans across the state and impacts on customers and staff. Descriptions of proposed changes are also posted on the agency web site for review and comment from local office staff; implementation teleconferences with local supervisors and staff are also conducted

prior to issuance of final revisions to the online policy manual. Workgroups on specific modernization topics (e.g., MIS improvements) are also held on a regular basis. Because Kansas has not implemented a formal comprehensive modernization initiative, most planning activities have centered on specific efforts, such as the development of the online application. In 2005 and 2006, the Governor's Task Force on Hunger was convened with staff from SRS, WIC, Health, Education, and Aging to strategize on ways to increase participation in the Food Assistance program. That group continues to meet regularly. State staff reported that state-led initiatives are generally implemented statewide, rather than being piloted first.

Modernization Efforts

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

➢ **Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility.** Customers must be receiving a TANF benefit to be categorically eligible for Food Assistance.

➢ **Simplified Reporting Requirements**. Kansas has a 12- and 24-month certification period for standard and elderly or disabled households, respectively.

➢ **Standard Self-Employment Deduction.** The state implemented a standard self-employment deduction.

➢ **Mandated Standard Utility Allowance**. Kansas took the option to mandate the Standard Utility Allowance.

➢ **Expanded Vehicle Exemption**. This policy is aligned with TANF; all vehicles are excluded.

➢ **Simplified/Combined Application.** Kansas has a combined application for Food Assistance, TANF and Child Care

Kansas also implemented a "universal access" policy so that a customer can apply for and receive benefits from any SRS service center in the state.

At the time of our visit, the state was seeking approval from FNS for a waiver of the face-to-face interview at the time of application. Rural areas in the western part of the state have applied the hardship exemption to grant telephone interviews to the elderly and disabled when appropriate. Although there has been an increase in the number of telephone interviews in the urban centers, the majority are still conducted in person.

Kansas has discussed implementing a Combined Application Project (CAP) demonstration but because it would require MIS changes it is on the "back burner."

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

Although there have been no statewide organizational changes or efforts to reengineer the service delivery process, selected offices have instituted some changes to improve access. For example, some offices have added up-front customer service staff in the lobby area to meet with clients and help with completion of the application, if needed. Others have designated staff to act as greeters. Intake and assessment staff are housed in the reception area in the Wichita office to assess client needs and discuss agency programs and community resources. Some offices have placed computers in the interview rooms so workers can process the application at the time of the interview.

As part of their efforts to improve access, some regions have placed workers at selected locations throughout their community where potential customers go for other services. For example, the Wichita SRS service center has a specialized unit of eight outstationed workers. Although the original impetus for the outstationed workers was to provide increased access to medical assistance, the initiative was expanded to include services for multiple benefits programs in 2000. Four of the eight workers are assigned to multiple sites so that services are provided at 12 community locations called Access Points. They are stationed at six health clinics, two food pantries, two rehabilitation centers, and two community centers. Selected though an interview process, most of these outstationed workers conduct intake and make eligibility determinations for Food Assistance and other programs on site prior to transferring cases back to the central office, but some also carry a caseload. One outstationed worker estimated that she takes about six applications per day; 75 percent of these are first-time applicants. The Kansas City office has a smaller number of outstationed workers in the community; Topeka recently recalled their outstationed workers to handle caseload work.

Establishment of office hours is a regional and local SRS service center decision and some offices have chosen to implement extended hours to better accommodate customers' needs. The Wichita office, for example, stays open until 7:00 pm on Mondays. In additional some of their workers are on a flexible schedule so that they are available to make telephone calls to customers either before or after normal business hours.

The West region piloted a task-based model for service delivery but, according to staff, it was an "utter failure" that resulted in increased error rates and was discontinued after two years. Reportedly, one of the reasons for the lack of success was that the decision to implement this model was made by high-level staff that did not have the buy-in of local staff. Lack of adequate training on new program assignments was also blamed for the lack of success.

Technological Innovations

Call Centers

During 2006 and 2007, Kansas convened workgroups to discuss the possibility of establishing statewide call centers to provide improved customer service and to decrease the burden on workers. Despite some interest, the state did not have either the available staff or

adequate funds to move forward with development of the required technology. Plans for statewide call centers were abandoned. At the time of the site visit, staff in the Wichita Region were discussing the possibility of developing a regional call or message center where customers could speak with a generic worker to report address changes or ask specific questions, which would then be passed on to their assigned caseworkers.

Electronic Applications and Online Tools

With the closing of more than half of its local offices in 2002, Kansas moved quickly to develop an online application to increase off-site access for customers. Because they "needed something quickly" they created a "bare bones" electronic application for Food Assistance, TANF, medical assistance and childcare, which was launched in 2003. Although it was not officially piloted, it was made available on the agency web site prior to the full public rollout. A screener is also available with the online application. The first version was not judged as user-friendly; it did not have an e-signature. Applicants had to print out a signature page and send or deliver it to a designated address.

Initially, workers did not generally encourage use of the online application; the majority of customers continued to use paper applications. The application does not prepopulate or link to the eligibility system so workers have to print out applications routed to their office one at a time. The original online application ran 30 pages and did not follow the sequence of the paper application, so workers copied the information on to paper applications. Recent modifications and upgrades to the application based on staff input have added an electronic signature, added a list of required verification documents, provided a notification when questions are not answered, decreased the size of the application and resequenced it to follow the format of the paper application. Staff can now print multiple applications at one time.

Although the state does not have the capacity to track the online applications, staff feel that there has been an increase in its use over time; they estimate that approximately 10 percent are submitted electronically. Staff have a wish list of additional changes, including the ability to prepopulate the eligibility system.

Paperless Systems

At the time of the site visit, only limited scanning and data imaging of documents was being done in selected offices, including the Wichita SRS Service Center. Although state staff are interested in moving to data imaging, they reported that their "antiquated" MIS does not have the technology required to attach scanned documents to the corresponding case records. Kansas does not currently have electronic case files; all case files are paper files.

Kansas has had an online policy manual for Food Assistance, TANF and childcare for more than five years. Notices regarding proposed policy changes are first posted on the SRS intranet for review and comment from field staff; updates on final changes are available to staff via the intranet as well. Developed in response to staff requests, a policy log is also available on the web site that provides questions and answers on specific policy issues.

Data-sharing

Workers are able to link directly with agencies such as the Social Security Administration, Department of Motor Vehicles, child support, Department of Labor, the Work Number, and KASPER (Kansas Adult Supervised Population Electronic Repository) for required verifications. They are hoping to develop a new link with the Veterans Administration soon.

Other Technological Innovations

Kansas has been pursuing efforts to replace the existing MIS/eligibility system for two years. The current system has been in place since 1988 and only minor modifications (e.g., changes to address simplified reporting) have been made since then. State and local staff describe it as "clunky" and labor intensive. Workgroups that included staff from the Health Policy Authority (the agency responsible for administering Medicaid) reviewed a number of options, looked at systems used by other states and developed specifications for the "dream" MIS. Plans were approved by the agencies but not funded by the Legislature. The request was resubmitted, but the governor did not include it in her budget so it was not presented to the Legislature a second time. Although the upgrade is currently on hold, staff have discussed plans to try to convince the Legislature that the lack of up-to-date technology affects the work process, timeliness, and their ability to produce reports on outcomes.

The state also has a toll-free number for customers that routes calls to the closest local office by area code of the call's origin.

Partnering Arrangements

As described above, the state launched a Community Collaboration effort establishing linkages with community partners to increase customer access as part of the response to the massive office consolidation in 2002. Staffed with workers whose jobs had been eliminated by the office closings, the initiative is based on the philosophy that the agency must increase access to their programs in the community to provide the best possible services for customers. Although the level of involvement varies across regions, most local offices have worked with partners to develop Access Points, or off-site locations where customers can obtain information about SNAP or application assistance. Access Point sites include libraries, churches, universities, clinics, banks, schools, health departments, and community-based organizations.

As part of the initiative, Community Coalition staff share information about the eligibility process and provide a profile of the typical Food Assistance or TANF client to partner organizations. Some of the hundreds of Access Points throughout the state are informational sites where applications and other benefits documents are available or which serve as sites for presentations. Other Access Points have volunteers who assist with the completion of the Food Assistance application, fax or mail-in needed documents, allow use of their phones for interviews, or, in some cases, follow-up on application outcomes. Other Access Points are staffed by outstationed SRS workers who are authorized to determine eligibility for benefits.

Wichita places outstationed workers at 12 Access Points but also makes contact every two to three months with workers at five additional unstaffed Access Points.

In FY2009, state bonus grants were used to fund outreach grants to seven community partners who are required to track (using date of birth) and submit monthly progress reports on the number of applications they assist with and the number approved. Grantee staff work closely with local SRS staff. State staff report that many continue to perform similar services after the grant funds are spent.

H&R Block initiated a $1 million partnership with SRS to assist individuals in applying for Food Assistance benefits at its tax-preparation sites. Originally pilot tested during the 2007 tax season in three counties, the program was rolled out statewide in 2008, with training provided to 425 H&R Block staff. During the tax preparation process, H&R Block staff offer assistance to potentially-eligible Food Assistance customers to complete the applications, using their Benefits Enrollment Network (BEN) software to capture required information and populate the application. Applications are then filed electronically or mailed to SRS service centers. This project was discontinued by H&R Block.

Since 2007, Inter-Faith Ministries, a community partner in Wichita, has been providing training on the Benefit Bank system and sharing that software with 25 to 30 community partner agencies since 2007. This web-based software is designed to connect potentially eligible customers to tax credits and refunds and any other public benefits for which they qualify. If a partner agency staff member helps an individual complete an application for Food Assistance, that application is printed out for the customer to take to their SRS service center. Applications from Benefit Bank are flagged so they can be tracked.

At the time of the site visit, staff in Wichita were preparing to participate in services at the Laid-off Worker center, a new one-stop initiative designed to address the multiple needs (e.g., rent, heat, food) of the large number of recently laid-off workers. SRS staff will be available to take Food Assistance applications at the center.

Outcomes Tracked

Although the state is not tracking the impacts of any specific modernization activities, Kansas monitors key outcome measures such as timeliness and accuracy. Because online applications are printed out and copied on to paper applications at the present time, the state does not have a precise tracking system in place to monitor the number of applications submitted electronically.

Each region has a performance improvement unit made up of staff positions eliminated by the office consolidation. Although there are variations across regions in the type of data reviewed, data analysts in Wichita's unit pull a data extract every month to examine processing times, time spent on paperwork, accuracy, number of pending applications and other caseload data down to the individual worker. This information enables them to monitor performance, identify trends and target areas in need of improvement and additional training. Wichita also distributes a Food Assistance "hot list" that identifies all cases that have not been processed within 20 days.

Outstationed workers in the Wichita SRS service center keep a hand tally of the number of applications they assist with and the number approved. Community partners are required to track and report similar data so the state and regions can report on specific outcomes, such as the amount of Food Assistance revenue generated in the community as a result of these efforts. e-Funds, the EBT contractor, provides regular reports on the disbursement of EBT payments.

The regions also conduct customer service surveys using in-person volunteers, random telephone calls and customer comment cards available in the lobby.

Challenges

The most overwhelming challenge identified by state and local staff is the difficulty in providing quality services to customers with reduced budgets, a hiring freeze, inadequate staff and rising Food Assistance caseloads. As noted above, Kansas planned to use their ARRA funds to hire temporary workers to conduct intake for new Food Assistance applications. State staff noted that lean economic times are particularly challenging for them, because Kansas "tends to do things on a shoestring;" staff is already at very low levels. Another major obstacle to modernization activities is the lack of resources for new technology. Staff described their unsuccessful efforts to obtain Legislative approval and funding for an overhaul of its MIS. Lack of funds was also cited as the reason for not implementing call centers or moving toward document imaging or electronic case files. In addition, reductions in staffing increase the competition for limited agency IT staff time for needed technology changes. Although staff were pleased with the recent modifications to the online application, they also described remaining flaws that still result in additional work for staff, including the inability to prepopulate the eligibility system. Because the current design allows customers to skip many questions, they receive many incomplete applications, which require follow-up. Staff also noted that the recent economic downturn has produced new applicants with more complicated cases; they are more likely to have more resources, need more verification or have recently applied for unemployment insurance.

*Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices*

Key among the successes cited by state staff is the success in developing community collaborations and a network of Access Points at community partner sites. Both state and local staff and administrators consider their overall efforts to improve customer access and customer service focus to be a major success. In Wichita, for example, changes recently implemented have greatly reduced wait times, with all clients being seen within 30 minutes. They also consider recent modifications and upgrades to the online application to be key accomplishments, resulting in improvements to the process for both customers and the workers.

Staff in the Wichita office consider their outstationed worker initiative to be a major success, enabling them to take services to customers in an environment that is familiar and comfortable and less stigmatized that the central office. State and local staff noted the importance of reaching out and collaborating with other partners in the community to meet customers where they are most comfortable and to increase their access to services.

Future Plans

Future plans for modernization activities in Kansas include possible implementation of a Combined Application Program (CAP) and the waiver of the face-to-face interview at the time of application. State staff reported that after waiver approval they plan to encourage its use, despite the fact that they believe staff will continue to be resistant. There is also interest in engaging some proactive eligibility (i.e., reminding customers of upcoming appointments, following up by phone with those who do not return recertification forms). As noted above, state staff plan to work with the Legislature to identify funding sources for a new MIS.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
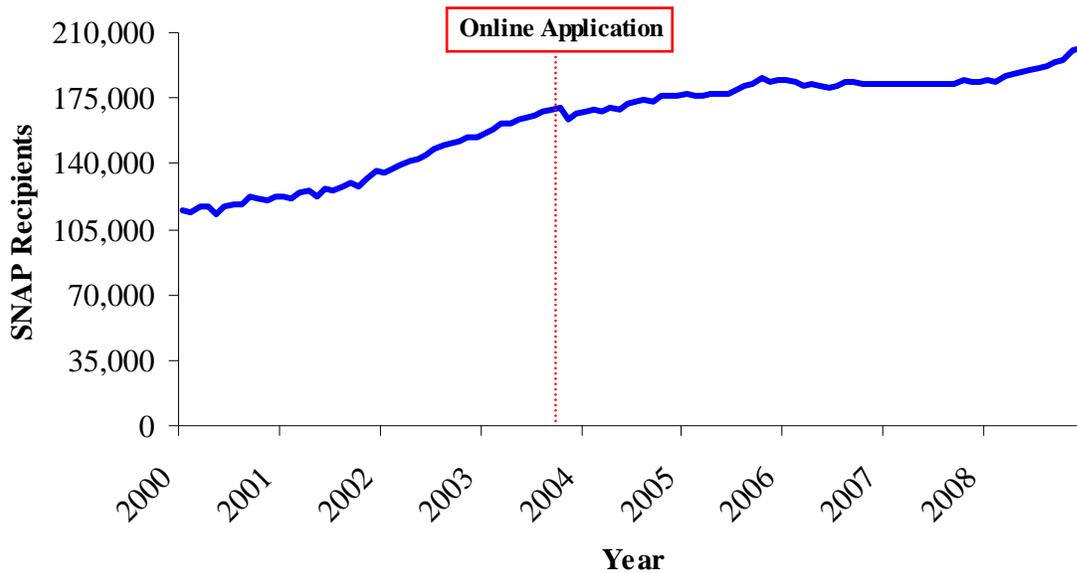
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, Topeka, KS (state office)
Wichita SRS Service Center, Wichita, KS (local office)
May 2009

MASSACHUSETTS CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

Since 2002, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has implemented a wide range of SNAP modernization activities, including creation of a shortened application form, instituting a waiver for face-to-face interviews at recertification, and the Bay State Combined Application Project. Massachusetts has also implemented various technological endeavors, including online applications, and pilot demonstrations for call center and document imaging operations. During the development of these initiatives, state SNAP staff worked closely with other state agencies and community partners.

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➢ State-Administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):**
> ➢ 505,782 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➢ 2008 Unemployment: 5.3%
> ➢ New governor (elected November 2006), agency commissioner (May 2007) and other high level agency staff
> ➢ Dramatic increase in SNAP applications

Organizational Structure

The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) is part of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHSS).[8] DTA has two program units responsible for delivering services and benefits to individuals and families: (1) Cash Assistance and Full Engagement (CAFÉ, which includes Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)) and (2) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The SNAP unit manages the program. Field Operations staff implement SNAP through 25 local offices (known as TAOs — Transitional Assistance Offices) around the state. The TAOs are distributed into four regions, each with a Regional Director. DTA staff are also co-located within 10 local community health and senior centers.

SNAP is state-administered. All DTA workers are state employees, although they are unionized and the union wields a great deal of influence. All policies and procedures are developed by the Central Office and distributed to the local offices through "Field Operation Memos" (procedures), "State Letters" (policies), and a monthly newsletter called *Transitions*. Field Operations Memos include specific instructions to ensure that department policies are followed correctly. BEACON II—the state's MIS for SNAP; TANF; Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children (EAEDC); SNAP; and the Housing Services Program—is also linked and updated with new policies by the Central Office. The Central Office has monthly meetings with the directors of each local TAO, and local TAOs have regular, internal supervisor meetings. TAO staff training is conducted for major changes. All staff also have access to an internal web site, "DTA online," which provides current policies, forms, and guides.

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[8] EOHHS also includes Public Health, Social Services, Transitional Assistance, Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Mass Health (Medicaid), among other agencies.

There is no variation in what local office staff are told to do or how information is conveyed from Central Office. There is, however, some variation in local implementation of policy (such as the process for dropping off verification documents) due to office size and staffing. However, there are many checks on policy implementation and practice—a supervisor must sign-off on almost all pieces of work completed by eligibility workers before they are processed—therefore, eligibility determination practices should be fairly consistent across local offices. The state auditor, as a result of an audit, imposes some of this internal control. Local offices do have some discretion over client flow and establishing liaisons for various initiatives. For example, some offices have established a point person for processing applications received electronically or for applications received through the Department of Mental Health/Department of Mental Retardation initiatives, discussed below.

Service Delivery Structure

Massachusetts uses a case management service delivery structure. Eligibility workers determine initial eligibility and then carry the case. Most offices have units of SNAP eligibility workers who are supervised by SNAP supervisors and separate units that handle cash assistance. DTA is moving toward the creation of specialized units to handle the processing of web applications.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

In large part, Massachusetts's efforts to modernize SNAP stem from the state's low participation rates—they were ranked 51st in the nation for food stamp participation in 2001.[9] In spring 2002, the Commissioner of DTA made Food Stamp Program access a priority. The state has since worked actively to increase participation through outreach and efforts to streamline the application process. Massachusetts's low participation rates, as well as DTA's concern to ease the administrative burden on field staff and to improve customer services, influenced their decision to take advantage of as many options under the 2002 Farm Bill as possible. More recently, changes have been made in an attempt to address the state's growing caseload and increase efficiency.

During the last several years, Massachusetts has seen a significant increase in SNAP applications and participation rates have soared. At the same time, local offices were consolidated and staff were laid off, although some staff have since been recalled. The increased caseloads have put a burden on staff, with workers carrying approximately 600 cases each (as of April 2009, up from approximately 300 each). Given the rising caseloads, the state has changed the focus of their outreach efforts. Rather than trying to "sell the program," the outreach staff focus on making sure people get the maximum benefits they are entitled to.

In 2006, DTA commissioned Public Consulting Group, Inc. (PCG) to "analyze current [SNAP] operations and make recommendations for business process changes that will result in

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[9] Castner and Schirm. *Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2001*. February 2004.

improved service delivery to the public."[10] Among other findings, this study found that the average SNAP worker is 54 years old and has worked for the agency for many years resulting in the accumulation of large amounts of vacation and sick leave. On any given day, approximately 25 percent of the state's SNAP workforce is using their accrued leave. Staff noted clients often cannot get in touch with their caseworkers due to these absences and the client-based structure.

PCG made 45 recommendations, divided in three tiers, for improving SNAP. "Tier I" recommendations are relatively simple to implement and require little or no additional resources. These include: "manage[ing] staff responsibilities to maximize customer service and provide consistent, manageable schedules for staff;" revising the SNAP application to include questions for expedited SNAP benefits; and modifying the computer-generated interview notice to include a more understandable explanation of required verification documents. "Tier II" recommendations involve "moderate and short-term investments of administrative resources or external contracted assistance" and "Tier III" recommendations require "significant investments in administrative or technology resources" and should be implemented in a 24-month or longer timeframe. A call center was suggested as one of the five Tier III recommendations. In fiscal year (FY) 2007 the state legislature mandated the creation of a call center staffed by DTA employees and included a $700,000 line item to pay for it. The legislature also mandated the implementation of a document imaging system, a Tier II recommendation.

Key Goals or Outcomes

As noted earlier, increasing the state's participation rates, as well as easing the administrative burden on field staff and improving customer services are primary goals. In addition, more recent changes have been made to address the state's growing caseload and to increase efficiency.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

New leadership, including a new governor, new agency commissioners, and turnover in senior staff has led to a change in how DTA does business. As one respondent noted, the "changing direction in leadership cannot be separated [from] efforts to modernize [SNAP]." Much of agency's attention has been focused on ways to manage increased caseloads rather than on "modernizing" SNAP. A number of cross-program workgroups have been established by DTA, including those focused on notices, procedures, posters, benefits for veterans, policy, business processes, and strategic development and community relations. Each workgroup is made up of five to ten staff from different units within DTA and is charged with the goal of reviewing and improving processes and documentation. The notices workgroup, for example, has been asked to review processes and documentation related to client notices. Their primary goal is to simplify notices and eliminate the bureaucratic language that has traditionally been in these notices. The strategic development community relations workgroup conducted focus groups with different populations across the state and is working on reinstating regional advisory councils. Its primary goal is to ensure that customer relations are going well. A push to create more uniform TAOs is a result of this group's efforts. It also oversees the state's recipient services hotline.

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[10] Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance Food Stamp Process Review. Public Consulting Group, Inc. June 30, 2006.

Modernization Efforts

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

Massachusetts has implemented many policy changes with the goal of increasing participation, relieving the administrative burden on staff, and enhancing customer service. Massachusetts has taken advantage of as many food stamp simplification options under the 2002 Farm Bill as possible. In 2002, the state reduced the food stamp application to four pages (one page for some populations, including SSI recipients). They provide transitional benefits (TBA) to closed TANF cases (at least five months); maximized categorical eligibility, have implemented a simplified elder application, and simplified some eligibility requirements to mirror TANF rules. Staff reported that eligibility workers noticed little difference in their job due to these changes. The changes have likely helped ease the difficulty of using the system for clients.

➤ **Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility.** The state expanded categorical eligibility by giving everybody who comes to DTA a resource brochure about all available social services. TANF dollars pay for the brochure, thereby providing recipients of the brochure with some type of TANF benefit.

➤ **Simplified Reporting Requirements** Massachusetts implemented universal semiannual reporting if applicants demonstrated a history of income or were homeless**.**

➤ **Expanded Vehicle Exemption.** Vehicles are excluded following the childcare rules.

➤ **Simplified Standard Utility Allowance.** Massachusetts has a mandatory standard utility allowance. Under Food Stamp Heat and Eat (H-EAT), DTA worked with the Department of Housing and Community Development to set up a system that provides SNAP recipients who do not pay a separate heating or cooling bill a one dollar per year fuel assistance benefit, which then qualifies them for a higher SNAP benefits through the Standard Utility Allowance. DTA provides the Department of Housing and Community Development with a list of households that are not claiming heat bills separate from rent, whose income is below 200 percent of poverty, and are not receiving the maximum benefit. The Department of Housing and Community Development then makes the checks available for those who wish to pick them up.

➤ **Self-Declaration of Dependent Care Deductions.** The state implemented in 2007.

➤ **Standard Medical Deductions.** The state implemented these in 2008.

➤ **Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview.** The state exempts many new applicants and those who are recertifying from the face-to-face interview without documenting hardship.

➤ **Combined Application Project (CAP).** The Bay State CAP is a fully automated application as a result of a collaboration between DTA and the Social Security

Administration (SSA). A specialized unit housed within the Malden TAO manages all case activities and recertifications for these SSI recipients who are unmarried, prepare food alone, have no earned income, and are U.S. citizens. The CAP unit receives the names of individuals from the SSI rolls who are eligible for this program. They then send the individuals a letter with an EBT card telling them they are eligible for Bay State CAP Food Assistance (they do not call it SNAP). Individuals need only activate the EBT card to begin receiving benefits. Bay State CAP recipients receive on average $23-$40 more in benefits than they would if they were receiving "regular" SNAP benefits, depending on their shelter costs. At initial start-up, a phone bank was set up to field questions about the letters and, at the time of our first visit had received approximately 17,000 calls—hundreds a day. Staff feel the phone bank was a key component of the program. At its peak, 60,000 people, many elderly, were enrolled through the CAP. By the time of our second visit, enrollment had declined to approximately 35,000 clients, which staff attributed to the instability of this population.

Initially, there was a huge outreach effort to enroll all eligible SSI recipients (through letters). Now, individuals are only enrolled into the program at application for SSI or during their SSI reevaluation, about every three to seven years. All CAP cases have a recertification period of three years and are error protected (because all information sent by SSA is considered to have come from a trusted source). The benefits are also higher than under traditional SNAP, and there is no paperwork for recipients.

➢ **Revolving Door Waiver.** In 2006, the state implemented a change in the way SNAP applications are processed when they are denied for failure to submit mandatory verifications. Under certain conditions, if applicants submit outstanding verification documents between day 31 and day 60, a new application is no longer required and the original date of application is reinstated. This policy goes into effect if the applicant has been interviewed and submitted one or more of the requested mandatory verifications on or before day 30; if DTA requested verifications after day 20; the applicant requested assistance or indicated problems obtaining the verifications; or the applicant notified DTA of a hardship that prevented verification submission by day 30. In the case that DTA requested all verifications by day 20; the applicant did not submit any requested mandatory verifications; and the applicant did not request help obtaining verifications or indicate a hardship, the case is reinstated effective the date verifications were received.

Extended Recertification Periods

The Tompkins Actuate Report[11] tracks SNAP applications in Massachusetts that take more than 30 days to approve or deny. In spring 2008 in an effort to improve recertification timeliness, DTA extended recertification periods to 24 months for elderly and disabled households and to 12 months for all other households. Simplified reporters are still required to recertify every six months.

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[11] Under Tompkins v. Dempsey, 293 N.W. 2d 771 Mich. Ct. App. 1980, should a state agency fail to comply with federal rules for handling cases, a court can order changes to the agency's operations, including caseload size and detailed case processing timetables.

Future Policy Changes

DTA staff have had preliminary discussions with staff from the Division of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) about prescreening families for SNAP eligibility when they apply for unemployment insurance (UI). DTA would like DUA staff to prescreen UI applicants during their initial UI interview. This effort is on hold as the state UI system is being redesigned. In the interim, a flyer with information on the SNAP program is included in the packet of information that UI recipients receive with their first benefit check.

A proposed standard self-employment business deduction of 40 percent is being considered. This would follow the state TANF rules for self-employment business deductions and should also increase SNAP eligibility.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

DTA is piloting SNAP outreach centers that are co-located in local community health and senior centers. DTA eligibility workers staff the outreach centers and provide information and application assistance. Due to the drastic increase in caseload and the demands on workers to be in the office, this form of outreach has been scaled back slightly, with the focus shifting more towards training staff in partner organizations to help their clients apply online.

As caseloads have increased dramatically, the Central Office has encouraged local TAOs to find unique approaches to dealing with their large caseloads, such as changing the way cases get assigned, and encouraging mail-in applications from clients. One TAO has also changed how they handle incoming recertifications. BEACON automatically sends participants their recertification applications and clerks initiate and monitor the process for recertification applications. At the time of our visit, staff hoped to develop a new report to help them manage the office workload. The report would include the total number of recertifications, reinstatements, and applications waiting to be processed.

Local offices were also trying new ways to process web applications. Brockton Call Center staff, for example, processed all web and faxed applications at the Brockton TAO. They also processed all expedited benefits. Applications for non-expedited benefits submitted through the call center were sent to non-call center eligibility workers for processing.

The Business Process Workgroup has been examining local TAOs—both their physical design and client flow. They are standardizing the design and flow in local TAOs so that each office presents clients with a similar process and environment. Examples of changes include a waiting room coordinator, self-service copy machines in waiting rooms, and the installation of kiosks.

DTA was restructured at the state level in 2005 and a separate Food Stamp Unit was created. There have been no significant administrative changes at the local level other than the closing and consolidation of some local offices.

Centralized Application Processing

At the time of our visit, DTA was developing centralized application processing as a way of reducing local office workloads. They implemented a centralized eligibility processing unit to handle questions related to applications. This unit was also handling the Revere TAO's web applications. After the cases were opened, they were sent to the Revere TAO for ongoing case management. In the western part of the state, a centralized office was handling the intake and ongoing work associated with web applications. Another centralized office was handling all emergency shelter cases in the Boston and North Shore area. DTA planned to open an additional office to handle all cash assistance casework and one to handle all SNAP casework and was looking at additional types of applications that could be centralized.

Technological Innovations

DTA has implemented a number of technological innovations, including call centers, an online application, and document imaging.

Call Centers

DTA's centralized eligibility and processing unit implemented a call center with three hotlines that operate from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. The first hotline is for new applicants and potential applicants. The second, SNAP-specific hotline provides information on where and how to apply for SNAP. The third hotline is an income verification line. In April 2009, the centralized call center began assisting the Revere TAO with its web applications and there were plans to increase centralized eligibility staff to allow them to process web applications for other TAOs as well. After the applications are processed, they are transferred back to the TAO. Centralized eligibility and processing unit staff do not carry cases.

In addition, a call center was implemented in the Brockton TAO in July 2007 for households served by that office. The call center is staffed by four case managers and was designed to handle SNAP applications and ongoing SNAP clients. Over time, the functions of the call center have changed. Initially, the call center handled any mailed, faxed, or dropped off applications, completing the initial Request for Assistance (RFA), screening applicants for expedited benefits over the phone, and then forwarding the application to the appropriate SNAP worker in the office. In mid-September 2007, call center workers assumed the responsibility of processing expedited benefits, completing the interview and issuing benefits. In November 2007 when the web application went statewide, call center workers began processing web applications in addition to their other duties. By April 2009, due to a large increase in call volume, call center workers handled only telephone and web applications and no longer initiated RFAs.

Online Application

The initial electronic food stamp application in Massachusetts was developed by a nonprofit organization, Project Bread, (in partnership with the state) under a 2002 grant from FNS. Later, the state developed a "Virtual Gateway" to provide online access to health and human services. An initiative of former Governor Romney, the Virtual Gateway was developed as a portal for various programs, and was part of the Governor's E-government efforts.

Development of the Virtual Gateway was funded through a state-issued bond. For SNAP applications, the Virtual Gateway Common Intake tool recently replaced the Project Bread-developed electronic application.

In 2002, Project Bread, a local nonprofit, received a grant from USDA to develop an online application. DTA was very involved with Project Bread during the planning of the initial online application; for example, DTA staff served as members of the development team. By 2004, applicants statewide were able to submit applications electronically but there was no way to provide signatures electronically. The electronic applications were completed and submitted to DTA through community partners. The online application was discontinued in 2007 and was replaced by the Virtual Gateway, described below.

Virtual Gateway

In 2004, the state piloted the Virtual Gateway, which is a portal for applying for various programs. Initially, the tool was created so that community partners could submit electronic Medicaid (MassHealth) applications to the state. The Virtual Gateway was later expanded to include applications for SNAP, WIC, childcare, housing, and mental health programs, but continues to be dominated by MassHealth. Since its launch, MassHealth applications have continued to dominate the Virtual Gateway.

At the time of our visit, the Virtual Gateway's *screening* tool allowed users to determine potential eligibility for 13 human service programs, including SNAP. It does not retain any of the information for application submission and does not approximate a SNAP benefit level.

The Common Intake component of Virtual Gateway includes: MassHealth; SNAP; Emergency Public Housing Assistance; WIC; Women's Health Network; Child Care; selected programs for individuals who are legally blind, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, individuals with cognitive disability, and veterans seeking inpatient or domiciliary care; vocational rehabilitation services; home care services for elders; and services for individuals with mental health needs or who have serious emotional disturbance.[12] By early spring 2007, the Virtual Gateway's "Common Intake" tool had expanded to include MassHealth, SNAP, Emergency Public Housing assistance, WIC, Women's Health Network, childcare, and other programs. However, all applications had to be submitted electronically through partner organizations—approximately 250 authorized providers have access to the Virtual Gateway, including community-based organizations, hospitals, and health clinics.

The Virtual Gateway's Common Intake tool holds an applicant's information for 60 days, allowing applicants to complete their applications at a later time. A generic verification checklist is produced at the end of the application process, so applicants understand what documents they will need to provide to the office. Web applications are assigned to a local office where a clerk will "bring the application into BEACON," or allow the Common Intake tool to populate BEACON. This information is reviewed by DTA local office staff who then contact the

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[12] The official web site of the Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), accessed 3/28/07.

applicant for missing information and to schedule an eligibility interview, which is typically completed by telephone.

The Virtual Gateway has two views for the SNAP application—the "provider view" and the "consumer face." The provider view, released before the consumer face, lets community partners help clients submit applications electronically. DTA staff trained hundreds of agencies that had worked with Project Bread's online application and an additional six agencies to submit SNAP applications through the Virtual Gateway. The consumer face was piloted through the Fall River TAO in March 2006 and allowed applicants to submit an application directly from any computer and includes an e-signature capability. It was rolled-out statewide in November 2007.

Document Imaging

In 2008, DTA piloted document imaging. Beginning in the Northshore TAO, they operated a two-phase process where workers processed documents using their traditional method and also scanned them. The document scanning was used to test the technology. At the time of our visits, they were planning an expansion of scanning operations but had not developed an implementation timetable. During the pilot they encountered problems with equipment and also found that the saving, indexing, and retrieving of comments added considerably to application processing time. When they expand document imaging operations, they will have a scan technician do all of the scanning and indexing of documents.

Management Information System

At the time of our visits, the BEACON system was undergoing an agency-wide upgrade. This was due to the discontinuation of the old platform. Staff did not anticipate any significant impact on the SNAP application and recertification processes or on clients.

My Account Page

DTA is developing a tool, called My Account Page (MAP), which would allow individuals applying via the Virtual Gateway to check on the status of their case as well as their benefit amount. The My Account Page will include BEACON-generated notices from the past 90 days as well as alerts (e.g., verification documents that need to be submitted). A soft launch was first planned for July 2009.

Partnering Arrangements

DTA has a long history of working with partner organizations, including community-based organizations and other state agencies. For example, the electronic application developed by Project Bread was piloted through four local DTA offices, each of which had a community partner. Gradually, this was expanded to partners and offices statewide.

More recently, DTA staff have worked closely with DMH/DMR staff as well as staff from local agencies operating group homes to improve the quality of information provided via applications received through their efforts to enroll DMH/DMR clients in the SNAP. DTA staff

have held numerous trainings with the individuals completing the SNAP applications on behalf of group home residents to educate them about the application process, including required verification documents. Liaisons were established at local TAO offices to process these applications and work directly with group home staff.

DTA has also partnered with the state's Division of Unemployment Assistance to provide information to Unemployment Insurance claimants. Information is provided to households when they first file a claim as well as when checks are mailed.

The outreach staff continually works with community-based organizations in all of their efforts described above. In addition, DTA staff recently trained hundreds of agencies, including hospitals, to use the Virtual Gateway to complete and submit SNAP applications.[13]

Outcomes Tracked

Massachusetts uses the BEACON system for eligibility determination and management of ongoing caseloads. Local office staff are not required to submit any additional data to the Food Stamp Unit. DTA central office staff have access to data from all offices. Through in-house queries, central office Food Stamp Unit staff can query data across any domain in the BEACON system. Through the internal "Food Stamp Info Share" web site developed by the Food Stamp Unit director, central office Food Stamp Unit staff have access to a wide variety of reports on participation rates, program integrity, and cost. Staff can also develop their own ad hoc reports. For example, they can determine weekly Common Intake statistics for applications filed through the Virtual Gateway (by organization that provided application assistance), monthly application statistics for number of new applications (including those who complete their application in more than 20, but less than 60 days) and recertifications approved and not approved by DTA office, the number of electronic versus paper applications received, and average monthly benefits. They intend to capture information on the call center and document imaging pilots, as well. This is done, in part, by tracking the number of calls received through the call center, how long callers were on hold, and how many calls were dropped.

Challenges

Massachusetts has encountered several challenges as they continue to modernize the state's SNAP. The dramatic rise in caseload size coupled with state budge cuts has hindered DTA's ability to implement many of the modernization initiatives they had hoped to. The change in administration and department leadership has led to changes in the Department's priorities.

Due in part to the state's expanded outreach efforts and to the variety of ways in which you can submit applications (via the Internet, by fax, by mail, in person), people receive SNAP applications from multiple sources and inadvertently send in multiple applications or send in applications when they are already receiving SNAP benefits. This causes delays in processing

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[13] DTA trained partner agencies on the food stamp application; other Virtual Gateway users have access to the food stamp application but may focus on other benefits programs (e.g., MassHealth).

applications as workers determine which are actually new applications rather than duplicates. Duplicate applications account for approximately eight percent of total applications received.

Staff in Massachusetts noted that verification documents present the biggest barrier to participation and streamlining this process could provide the most beneficial change for applicants. They indicated that many families feel verification requests are an invasion of their privacy. Many applicants also feel that each time they bring in a verification document, they are required to provide something new. Staff noted that the change to six-month reporting for some households has increased participation rates. They feel that adopting a standard deduction for medical expenses would reduce the verification burden and also increase participation.

The Food Stamp Unit experienced several challenges related to developing and implementing the online application. The system requires many "work-arounds" to make terminology applicable to the multiple programs it is used for. For example, SNAP defines a "household" differently than most other programs. They also noted the competing priorities related to system development. MassHealth has always been the dominant program for the Virtual Gateway and staff noted that programming for SNAP always seems to be competing with the demands for MassHealth enhancements.

Challenges associated with implementing the electronic applications exist at the local level, too. Initially, some local office staff questioned the authenticity of electronically submitted applications and did not process them immediately. From the start of implementation, a web liaison was designated in each local office to check for electronic applications daily and ensure they were assigned to an eligibility worker. Complications also arise when an individual submits an application electronically and in-person creating a duplicate application.

Staff noted that applicants who submit an electronic application through the Virtual Gateway are often frustrated with the SNAP eligibility determination process. Because BEACON is interactive, eligibility workers must work through each screen of the application—they cannot just review missing items with applicants. Many workers go through the entire interview with applicants verifying all of the information submitted through the electronic application. In addition, workers need to ask additional information, "drilling down" on each topic covered in the application. DTA staff consider it to be a cumbersome application process. They think CBO staff should better prepare clients as to what to expect, including long interviews with DTA workers despite the fact that they answered similar, if not identical, questions with the CBO representative assisting them with the online application.

Food Stamp Unit staff noted that applications submitted electronically often require considerable follow-up. They hope that by providing additional training to the 26 partner agencies on the Virtual Gateway, and more specifically on the SNAP application, they will improve the outcomes. They have also developed a "next steps" checklist that partner agencies can share with applicants to give them a better understanding of the entire application process.

There are also concerns about denial rates and whether or not ineligible households are encouraged to apply for the SNAP. Under traditional applications, DTA has a 70-percent

approval rate as compared to an approximately 50-percent approval rating for web-based applications (including the Virtual Gateway and Project Bread electronic application).

Co-location of the call center and a traditional TAO has led to tension between the two office units. There is a lack of cohesion between the two units and a high level of resentment as each has an inaccurate perception of the other's workload and responsibilities.

Despite the integrated nature of the Virtual Gateway, staff have found that there is no incentive for Mass Health Virtual Gateway users to encourage people to apply for SNAP. There is no indication that the many health providers using the Virtual Gateway are screening their clients for SNAP eligibility.

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

Massachusetts clearly views modernization as more than implementation of new technology. The state has successfully implemented a host of policy changes, including Heat and Eat and expanded categorical eligibility that have allowed them to increase their participation rate dramatically. Even in the face of rising caseloads and shrinking resources, they continue to work to get SNAP benefits to more households.

The Bay State CAP has allowed the state to enroll thousands of people (approximately 10 percent of their overall caseload) that staff feel would not have previously applied for food assistance. The program has had a particular impact on the elderly because no paperwork is required. Staff reported that many Bay State CAP participants receive at least $23 per month more in SNAP benefits. Local office staff said many elderly Bay State CAP participants have thanked them for the SNAP benefits. The work associated with the CAP is fairly straightforward and streamlined for SNAP staff—all processing is conducted through the mail or by fax.

The state's Virtual Gateway allows individuals and families to "one-stop shop" and access all services.

Future Plans

Massachusetts continually works to improve and enhance SNAP with the goal of increasing participation, relieving the administrative burden on staff, and enhancing customer service. DTA continues to seek out new avenues for outreach and partnerships with other agencies and community-based organizations. DTA is also considering implementation of Interactive Voice Recording (IVR) to provide clients updated information.

Several current DTA initiatives are in pilot phases and will be implemented statewide in future years. Statewide rollout of document imaging is one such initiative and is anticipated to coincide with the implementation of BEACON-3. Call center operations may also be expanded statewide.

DTA staff have had preliminary discussions with staff from the Division of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) about prescreening families for SNAP eligibility when they

apply for unemployment insurance (UI). DTA would like DUA staff to prescreen UI applicants during their initial UI interview.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
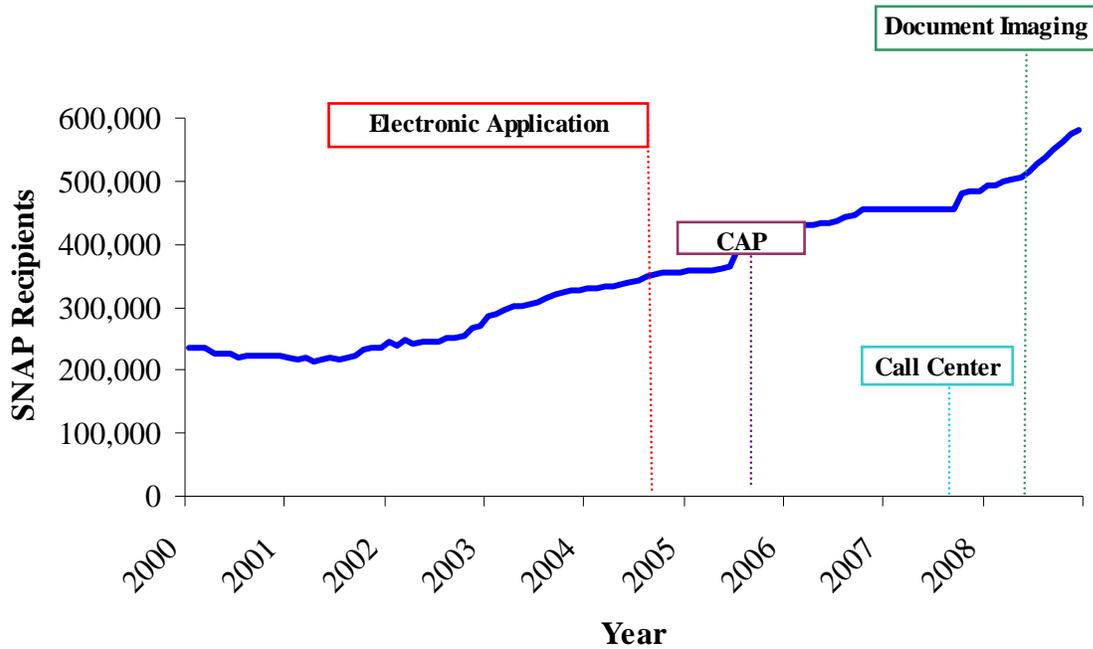
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), Boston, MA (state office)
DTA, Malden Transitional Assistance Office, Malden, MA (local office)
March 2007

DTA, Boston, MA (state office)
DTA, Brockton Transitional Assistance Office and Call Center, Brockton, MA (local office)
DTA, Newmarket Square Transitional Assistance Office, Boston, MA (local office)
April 2009

MISSISSIPPI CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

Due primarily to technological limitations, prior to 2007 Mississippi's modernization initiatives were confined mostly to policy efforts and administrative changes. Policies and business processes, including simplified reporting, consolidated applications, and a Combined Applications Program (CAP) with the Social Security office, were sought to reduce the burden of applying and recertifying for both staff and clients.

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➢ State-Administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):**
> ➢ 447,181 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➢ 2008 Unemployment: 6.9%
> ➢ State hiring restrictions
> ➢ Staff shortage
> ➢ Received payment accuracy
> ➢ Received payment accuracy bonus money since 2000 (none in 2005)

In 2007, however, the state upgraded its computers from Dumb Terminals to Wyse systems, giving Mississippi greater programming capabilities and more flexibility in bringing in technological modernization initiatives. With those changes, state officials started pilot programs for document imaging and caseload management systems. It also automated its policy manual and put it online, along with various notifications and alerts for staff members and clients. Mississippi noted great success in adapting other state modernization efforts to fit their system, improving on other's models and giving local offices a measure of flexibility to figure out how to maximize the efficiency of the effort.

Organizational Structure

All USDA programs, including SNAP, are run out of the Economic Services Division at the Mississippi Department of Human Services. The state is split up into seven regional offices, each with 5 to 15 county offices (72 in total) under their purview.

Service Delivery Structure

Local offices operate on a case management model, with eligibility workers dealing with both SNAP and TANF applications. Responsibility for Medicaid claims was moved to another division in 2004.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

The Governor and the appointed Secretary of Health and Human Services reportedly set the broad, general goals of modernization—e.g., advancement in technology. The impetus for various specific modernization initiatives, however, often came directly from state level policy, information technology, and top-level Economic Services Division leadership seeking incremental program improvements. Examples of initiatives reportedly came from other states, including modernization efforts in Alabama, Minnesota, Florida, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Staff learned about other state initiatives largely at events like the National Association for Program Information and Program Management (NAPIPM) meetings. Both bonus money from FNS for payment accuracy and timeliness, and the sharp increase in caseloads after the 2005 Hurricane Katrina, also provided a means and a reason for modernization.

Key Goals or Outcomes

Mississippi's key goals behind modernization include: simplifying the system, decreasing staff workloads, increasing timeliness, improving customer service, reducing storage needs, keeping better track of client documents, increasing participation rate, and creating interactive online applications.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

Several modernization initiatives in Mississippi were adaptations from other state modernization efforts, shaped to fit Mississippi's system. South Carolina uses the same MIS system and therefore technological enhancements were reportedly easily shared between the two states. Technological initiatives generally required IT staff time to program in changes to the MIS system, and were slowed due to limited IT staff availability.

For most of the larger changes, MS relied heavily on piloting programs before taking an initiative statewide. For document imaging, the state offices were automated first, dealing only with fair hearings claims after Katrina. Then the initiative was piloted in two counties. Staff who participated in the pilot program were used to expand the initiative to other counties, through on site technical assistance, and to help edit training manuals.

Modernization Efforts

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

➢ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.** In 2005, Mississippi received a waiver to implement Simplified Reporting for its non-elderly and non-disabled population. These households report on a simplified form and are not required to report changes in income that are still below 130 percent of the poverty line. Staff noted that clients and eligibility workers have reacted positively to the change, as they no longer have to go through monthly reporting of check stubs and verification with employers. Moreover, with less verifications and action on cases, staff noted more success in the QC process. For elderly and disabled households, however, "change reporting" is used, where changes greater than $50 must be reported by the 10th of the following month.

➢ Mississippi moved from monthly reporting to annual and semiannual reporting. Elderly and disabled households were reportedly on 12-month reporting while others adhered to 4 to 6 month reporting, depending on the circumstance. This reportedly

has cut down on office traffic and the burden of maintaining benefits. Staff reported, however, that a significant number of clients still come in monthly despite being told about the extended reporting periods.

➢ **Expanded Vehicle Exemption.** In 2002, Mississippi adopted its TANF vehicle exemptions for their SNAP program, counting only recreational vehicles that are not used as a home, as an asset. This reportedly reduced the amount of verification staff needed to do using DMV data bases, and increased client eligibility.

➢ **Combined Application Program.** In 2002, Mississippi implemented its CAP program, MISCAP, for those who were single SSI or combined SSI recipients. Staff noted that the caseload for MISCAP hovers around 22,000 to 25,000 cases, statewide, and that recently program officials had conducted outreach efforts to increase participation. As part of those efforts, staff matched SNAP and SS databases to find clients that were potentially eligible but not participating. Letters were then sent to 30,000 people, explaining the program and including an application.

➢ Staff noted that the MISCAP program was a great means of accessing target populations. All MISCAP participants are certified for four years, and are not required to complete face-to-face interviews. At the time of this study, Mississippi was document imaging all MISCAP files and used an automated application system that pre-populated information from the Social Security Administration database.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

Help Desk

The Mississippi Economic Service Division maintains a Help Desk to deal with programmatic questions/issues coming from local and regional offices, changes in policy, and various trainings. The Help Desk consists of 12 employees at the state level, split into two six-person teams: Systems and Training. The systems staff is in charge of sending bulletins to local offices, documenting changes in the program or solutions to problems staff are having. Local and regional offices use the Help Desk for program questions by filling out forms, "E-100s", available online and sent electronically to Help Desk staff

Interactive Interviews and Consolidated Applications

In 2005, Mississippi looked to make its interviewing process more efficient by reducing the steps for eligibility workers and consolidating the application from 24 pages to 4 pages. Based on similar changes implemented in South Carolina, Mississippi moved from conducting interviews by filling out hard copies to bringing clients back to computers and inputting their information directly into the MIS system, Mavericks. Staff noted that the change resulted in significant time savings by eliminating duplicated processes and allowing for more immediate verification of documentation. At the time of our study, Mississippi was expanding the interactive interviewing process from a few local pilot counties to the entire state.

Compressed Schedule

As a budgetary measure, DES staff moved to a 4.5-day work week, with "compressed" days assigned to workers. Staff interviewed reacted positively to the change noting they are able to accommodate workers who needed mornings or afternoons off, and that the shortened week helped with staff "burnout." Interviewees did also mention, however, that a shortened week did not reduce the amount of work that the office had to accomplish.

Wireless RV System

In 2005, in response to Hurricane Katrina, DES outfitted an RV with a satellite, wireless Internet, and access to the Maverick mainframe that could administer SNAP within hard hit communities. Clients could both apply and get SNAP and emergency SNAP turned on without having to go into a service center.

Technological Innovations

Electronic Applications

Printable applications were available to clients online, however, Mississippi had a goal of creating an interactive form that could be submitted online and sent to the appropriate local office. Staff mentioned that they were fortunate to have Florida in their region so they could draw upon their experience in dealing with electronic applications.

Paperless System

*Document Imaging—*Starting with Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Mississippi's DES began to automate internal files and Katrina applications for emergency food stamps. As part of that effort, the state planned to streamline the QC process with FNS, putting all QC files online and transmitting them to the regional FNS office. Currently all MISCAP applications are automated, including the historical files associated with the program. One local office had fully implemented a document imaging pilot, and state officials were expanding the pilot to two other counties. The pilots, including the software and equipment, were in part funded by bonus money given my FNS for accuracy.

Early in the implementation process, staff at documenting imaging pilot sites noted that imaging helped secure and organize documents while also reducing the burden on clients to keep producing the same documentation every time they came in. Significant savings on storage space, however, had not yet been realized. Pilot sites noted that they were maintaining hard copies of all their files in case the system crashed. Moreover, older files were not scanned according to staff because they viewed it as a waste of time; only files received after the start of the pilot were scanned.

Within the pilot sites, once documents were turned into the county office, the papers were scanned by clerks and sent electronically to an eligibility worker's "Inbox." an electronic

organization system used to verify client information given in the interview. Once the documents and the interview were complete, a supervisor would approve the application. From there, all scanned images were sent out of the eligibility worker's Inbox and into a server, Interwoven, where they remained on file for future applications and recertifications.

Electronic Training and Policy Manuals—In 2008 and 2009, Mississippi stopped issuing hard copies of training and policy manuals. All copies are now sent out electronically or posted online. Staff noted that this resulted in a significant reduction in their use of paper.

Stationary Function—DHS created an automated forms program within staff e-mails called Stationary. Staff can convert paper forms into electronic templates that can be sent electronically. The stationery function in staff e-mail includes paper forms that have been previously recreated in an electronic format and sent to county and regional offices. State staff noted that the program is used on a limited basis but all forms will be automated soon.

Data-sharing

Work Number—In 2009, DES piloted a three month data brokering arrangement with Work Number, a privately run data base of employers and workforce information. Eligibility workers were able to verify client employment and wage information using a third-party web site, without having to have a client's employer fill out separate employment information forms for each employee applying for SNAP. Staff noted that the service helped with fraud and timeliness (verifications came up to 10 days more quickly, according to some staff) for both the eligibility workers, the clients, and the employers. Indeed, Work Number took away the employment form requirement for all those employers that were part of the database, and was instant. Future extension of the pilot project was unknown, but largely depended on funding availability.

Online Data Matches—Local DHS offices have multiple online data systems available for verification. Data matches with Social Security, employment (as mentioned above), corrections, and Human Services benefits in other states, through PARIS (Public Assistance Reporting Information System) were automated and available online for eligibility workers.

Partnering Arrangements

Mississippi had not established significant, formal partnerships with community organizations. With that said, Mississippi's Division of Community Services, also under the Department of Human Services, reportedly worked with DES and SNAP through its allocation of Community Services Block Grants to a network of community action organizations. DES staff noted that informal partnerships with community organizations were used for application assistance, referrals, and information sharing. Formal contractual agreements were set up with Mississippi State University to conduct statewide SNAP and nutrition education.

Outcomes Tracked

Aside from FNS reported measurements, Mississippi does not track additional performance measurements. Modernization efforts were largely evaluated on staff feedback and the quality control (QC) and Management Evaluation (ME) processes.

Challenges

Aside from budget shortfalls and the cost of new technology, staff in Mississippi most commonly reported that cultural changes were the most difficult barrier to modernizing the SNAP system. Both technological and policy changes were met with resistance, particularly from staff who had grown used to the system over a number of years, or who were unfamiliar with computers and newer technology. This, in turn, also reportedly added to staff turnover challenges, as older staff left, and newer staff had to be brought in and trained.

Staff also mentioned that dealing with the culture, policy, and technology of other benefit systems, particularly Medicaid, posed challenges. Small changes in the SNAP policy or technology had to be reconciled with the policies and programming of other benefit programs that shared the MIS system. New equipment also required coordinating with outside vendors, which compounded the difficulty of dealing with other the benefit programs.

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

Mississippi mentioned several areas were modernization efforts brought about successful outcomes, mainly in technological upgrades, time-savings measures, and administrative changes that helped staff retention. ESD reported that at least some of its success in regards to technological innovation was due to their strong relationship with the IT division of DSS. Upgrading to new computer terminals opened ESD staff up to more communication and more possibilities, like document imaging. Moreover, document imaging and other paperless initiatives mentioned above, reportedly opened up storage space in the state offices and reduced the burden on both clients and staff in local offices.

In addition, staff involved in the Work Number pilot expressed positive reactions and significant time savings for staff processing applications, and for clients waiting for application approval. Staff noted that income verifications could come as much as 10 days quicker using the Work Number service. What is more, the service also reportedly cut down on fraudulent employment forms, where clients decided to fill employer sheets out themselves.

Staff in local offices using compressed time, also reported positive responses, and felt that compressed time allowed for more flexible work environments and thus more staff retention. Mississippi identified a number of lessons learned for modernization. Staff stressed the importance of keeping communication open between the state and local offices during implementation of efforts, and the importance of training. In recent years, Mississippi implemented Corrective Action Teams (CAT) to target counties for special training. Staff also noted that using pilots was important in creating successful trainings and in implementing initiatives statewide, and that a certain degree of flexibility should be given to pilot projects so

that staff can work through and change problems in the original design. Pilot staff, moreover, reportedly should be used for expanding an initiative to other counties. According to staff, it is the workers who have gone through a process that are the most effective teachers.

Future Plans

In addition to the expansion of their document imaging pilot and interactive interviewing, staff were looking informally at expanding its use of automated systems. Specifically, staff mentioned applying for electronic signatures for electronic applications that can be submitted online and for supervisors to sign off on applications remotely. Staff also mentioned automating the state report process for counties and making the Mavericks system more interactive for staff completing interviews. These initiatives, however, were still in the early planning stages.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
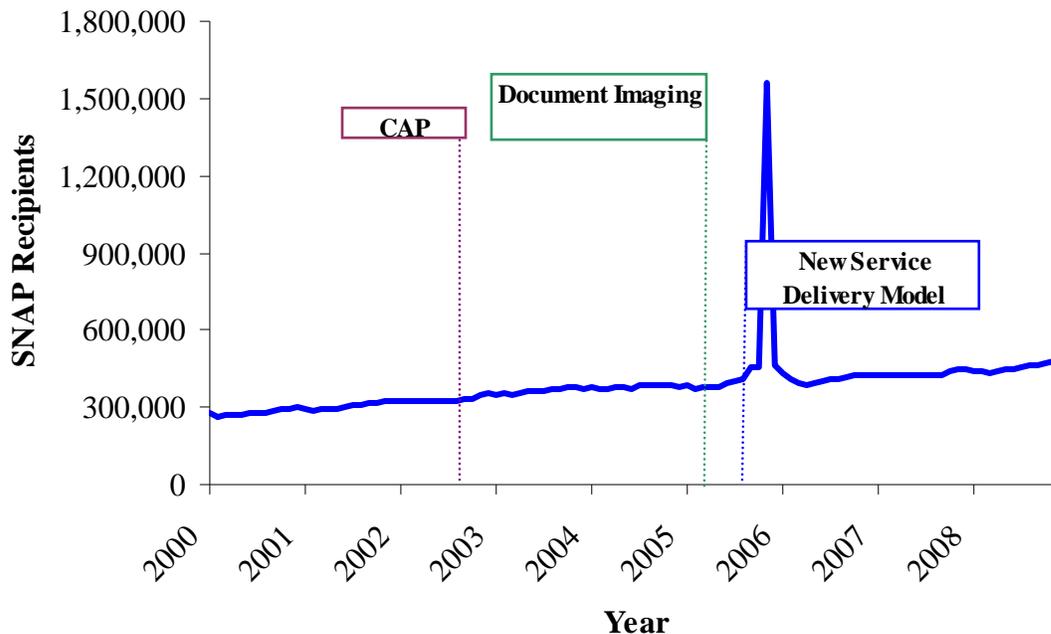
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Mississippi Department of Human Services, Division of Economic Assistance, Jackson, MS (state office)
Rankin County Department of Human Services, Division of Economic Assistance, Rankin, MS
April 2009 (local office)

NORTH CAROLINA CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

North Carolina has undergone significant modernization, both at the state and county level. As a county-administered state, county offices maintain flexibility over their local office business processes and, in many cases, technology, while the state generally controls policy decisions. Many initiatives, therefore, have been incremental and county specific, including call centers, document imaging, and various intake processes. North Carolina has also been planning and rolling out a statewide, comprehensive modernization initiative titled North Carolina Families Accessing Services through Technology (NC FAST), since 2000. The plan introduces new tools to streamline the process for local eligibility workers and administrative staff, by consolidating data systems, providing online verification, and implementing a central case management system with more flexibility and organization tools for workers.

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➤ County-Administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):**
> ➤ 946,978 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➤ 2008 Unemployment: 6.3%
> ➤ Budget cuts
> ➤ Hiring Freeze
> ➤ Increasing and changing caseload
> ➤ Received payment accuracy bonus money for past 5 years

Organizational Structure

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services oversees four separate divisions: the Division of Child Development (DCD), the Division of Social Services (DSS), the Division of Health Service Regulation (DHSR), and the Division of Aging and Adult Services (DOA). DSS administers SNAP benefits under the Economic and Family Services section, with 100 county DSS offices operating under the state office. In addition to SNAP, DSS offices administer Child Welfare services, Work First (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF), Child support, Emergency Assistance, and Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) benefits. The Economic and Family Services section specifically administers SNAP, TANF, LIHEAP, Medicaid, and Refugee Assistance.

Service Delivery Structure

Service delivery methods and structures varied depending on the county office. The Mecklenburg County DSS offices use a case management model, with 23 intake workers covering only SNAP cases, 15 workers covering SNAP and Medicaid cases, and approximately 27 workers handling a combination of Work First and Medicaid cases. In contrast, case managers are program specific in Wake County, with SNAP case managers dealing only with SNAP applications. Work First cases and Medicaid and disability claims are handled separately.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

Much of the impetus for various incremental modernization efforts started with direction from state leadership on policy changes, and county leadership when it came to administrative and technological changes. Staff noted some initiatives originated in other states or counties, and were championed by leadership at the state or county level. Staff noted larger modernization shifts came with the "vision" of new directors. Recently, the economic downturn and subsequent influx in applications has caused both state and local offices to increase their efforts for finding ways to simplify the process and increase efficiency.

North Carolina's more comprehensive modernization initiative, NC FAST, reportedly started as the result of county pressure to modernize as they hired younger staff with more computer experience, and state pressure as they saw businesses making changes and government being "left behind." The continuation of the project, according to staff, relied on top-level support from the state secretary of DSS and FNS bonus money.

Key Goals or Outcomes

North Carolina's key modernization goals include increased customer access and participation, a simplified process for workers, a completely paperless system, increased service value, and improved productivity.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

For policy initiatives, North Carolina must pass elected policy initiatives though their Administrative Rules Process (ARP); USDA mandated rules, however, do not have to go through the process. ARP includes public hearings and an eventual vote by ARP committee members. Once policy changes are chosen at the state level, they are submitted to the Economic Services committee that meets monthly with voting members and anyone else interested in the process. Committee members vote on policy decisions and have working groups that consider policy options and waivers; larger counties have two votes and smaller counties have one vote. The state also uses a County Directors Association to discuss policy when the state initiates change. The body provides feedback to the state on policy options, but ultimately the state decides whether or not to implement a given policy initiative. County commissioners, who both hire and fire DSS directors and make the county's budget and policy decisions, also participate in the decision making process through the committees. According to state staff, their buy-in is important to the success of implementation. Staff also noted that legislators may pass bills to force DSS to make a policy decision—as was the case for broadening the categorically eligible population.

Each county DSS agency has a team of state program staff representatives that consists of Local Business Liaisons, Work First Program Consultants, SNAP Program Consultants and State Help Desk representatives that are available to provide policy training, interpret federal regulations, conduct training for local offices, and implement state policy decisions.

NC FAST is planned and implemented by a 12-person Executive Steering Committee that meets monthly and keeps the project on track. The committee is made up of the DHHS assistant secretary, DHHS division directors, county representatives, and a staff member from the Comptroller's Office.

Modernization Efforts

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

➢ **Waiver of the Face-to-Face Interview.** North Carolina's application for a broader waiver of face-to-face interviews for all clients at both recertification and certification was reportedly denied. Since, the state has decided not to reapply for the waiver.

➢ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.** Starting in 2008, all households must report changes by the 10th of the following month. Previously, various groups of clients had different reporting requirements that reportedly caused confusion and some QC errors. In early 2009, North Carolina planned to apply for Simplified Reporting for non-elderly and non-disabled clients, with yearly certification and six-month reporting, effective by August 1, 2009.

➢ **Expanded Vehicle Exemption.** Effective March 1, 2009, North Carolina changed its SNAP vehicle policy to mirror its TANF program, which only counts boats as an asset. Staff noted that this helps caseworkers since they no longer have to run DMV searches. The change was reportedly less significant for clients because few clients were previously denied eligibility due to vehicle ownership.

➢ **Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility.** In 2008, North Carolina chose to adopt TANF allowable resources for their SNAP eligibility criteria. This increased clients' allowable income and resources while maintaining eligibility and reducing the amount of documentation and verifications required during the application process.

➢ **Calculation of Net Income for Entire Immigrant Household.** In 2008, state officials changed SNAP policy for undocumented immigrant households. Previously, eligibility was calculated using a pro-rated household income, based on the number of citizens in the household. The 2008 change removed the pro-rated calculation, basing eligibility on total household income. Staff noted that the change was initiated by calls from County Directors to make eligibility determinations consistent between citizen and non-citizen households.

➢ **Combined Application Project (CAP).** North Carolina's CAP, the Simplified Nutrition Program (SNAP), began in 2005. Program participants must be single, elderly recipients of SSI. As part of the program, North Carolina gives two standard benefit amounts: high, for those with more than $150 in monthly shelter expense, and low, for those with less than $150 monthly shelter expense. Income and deductions

were not included in the benefit calculation. This reportedly raises participants' benefit levels.

The state initially identified 70,000 people potentially eligible, but participation in the program only reached 19,000 by early 2009. DSS planned to partner with the Division on Aging to administer outreach for the program through flyers and brochures at senior centers and food banks.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

Service Delivery Interface (SDI)

In 2006, as part of the broader roll out of NC FAST, North Carolina implemented SDI's in select counties. SDI adapts specific county legacy systems with the statewide reporting system, FSIS, so that information does not need to be entered into two systems. Rather, information entered into the county specific legacy system will automatically populate the state system. This enables NC FAST to be launched statewide even with multiple county legacy systems.

Service Registration System

In Wake County, office staff implemented the Service Registration System, or SRS. Reception workers, using client social security numbers, check clients into SRS when they enter the reception area. SRS gives staff a client's application history, family benefit information, and basic client information. SRS notifies caseworkers that a client is in the office and reception staff monitor how long the client has been waiting. For clients dropping off documents, SRS prints document receipts for clients. Staff noted that clients have reacted positively to receipts, citing previous fears over lost documents.

Generic Workers

As part of the broader modernization effort NC FAST, state officials plan to move from predominantly specialized caseworkers to a more generic caseworker model. This would be possible because the NC FAST system will determine eligibility for all programs under DSS and will not require staff to become experts in all areas.

Outstationed Workers

In 2009, Mecklenburg County began outstationing workers, called "Community Support Liaisons," in the community. Workers make referrals and take applications at community-based organizations, community centers, and hospitals. This was reportedly part of the new Mecklenburg director's vision to increase access.

Extended Office Hours

As recently as June 2009, several county offices extended their office hours to accommodate the schedules of an increasingly large and more diverse caseload. Mecklenburg County opened its offices on Saturdays so individuals with jobs could apply. This initiative was reportedly the direct result of responses to customer surveys.

Regionalization

In Wake County, three regional centers administer SNAP benefits, including a new regional center opened in 2009. The additional center was reportedly the result of "100 people per day" moving into Wake County. Regionalization of the offices aims to increase access for those not close enough to the existing DSS offices. Staff at local DSS offices reported, however, that staff shortages made it difficult to send out caseworkers to the regional offices.

Triage System

Wake County, building off similar initiatives in Michigan, implemented a "triage" system for its reception area. The triage system hands out different colored numbered cards to clients, signifying their program, or whether clients were delivering documents or they came to make changes. Colored cards are handed out on a first come first served basis. When a number and color are called, clients go speak to the reception staff at the window. Triage reportedly reduced waiting times for those who were only in the office to drop off information and allowed people to sit while waiting, rather than stand in line.

Fish Bowl

Wake County uses a "fish-bowl" intake process, where clients attend one of four informational classes on a given day, to review the eligibility criteria, responsibilities, and documentation requirements. Based on a first come first served basis, 22 clients are assigned to each class starting at 9 am, 10:30 am, 1 pm, and 3 pm, depending on when they check in at the triage desk. Once the class is over, clients then meet with individual case managers to complete the application. Staff reported that the decision to use the Fishbowl intake process was based on a pilot that showed group information sessions were faster than one-on-one sessions for staff. Staff also worried that disabled clients would have difficulty returning to the caseworkers' offices.

Technological Innovations

Call Centers

Both Wake and Mecklenburg Counties operate call centers. Wake County's call center has been in operation since before 2000, and handles calls for all the offices in the region. Staff estimated that their eight full-time employees receive 3,500 to 4,000 calls a day, but are not able to answer all of them. Staff training lasts three months. Workers are encouraged to answer all

client questions on the first call to avoid additional calls. Clients are routed to an automated response unit that gives recorded responses for directions and office information and directs calls to customer service representatives, appointment scheduling, energy assistance and flu shots, EBT card help, health clinics, or to call center representatives. The automated unit can have up to 50 people on hold—anyone beyond 50 will hear a busy tone. Staff reported that the average call lasts 86 seconds for English speaking clients, and 221 seconds for Spanish speaking clients. Clients wait on average 3 to 5 minutes to speak with an English-speaking representative and 15 to 20 minutes for a Spanish-speaking representative. Call center staff answer general questions for DSS programs, schedule appointments for caseworkers, and make referrals to DSS programs. Staff planned to start taking address changes later in 2009.

Previously, Wake County used a switchboard but found that they were dropping a large number of calls every day. Using IT budget money, the call center upgraded to "Auto Attendant" software, with automated response capabilities. The answer rate in June 2009 stood around 63 to 65 percent.

Wake County Staff noted that they were moving in the direction of the Mecklenburg County call center model, where call center staff handle more of the "traditional caseworker responsibilities." Mecklenburg's call center deals with changes and recertifications, and also administers the SNAP/CAP cases.

Electronic Applications

North Carolina implemented a printable version of its application online in 2000. As part of NC FAST, state officials plan to implement an electronic signature so applications can be submitted online.

Paperless System

Document Imaging—In 2009, Mecklenburg County began implementing document imaging in some of their county offices. Staff noted it was still too soon to assess the effects of the imaging. Staff was, however, seeking ways to improve the process before implementing it in the county's largest office. Imaging was both a county and state initiative; DSS was considering the prospect of division-wide scanning and Mecklenburg had already begun planning an initiative of their own using matching funds from the state. Staff already reported positive reactions from clients previously hesitant to drop off documentation like IDs and birth certificates. As part of NC FAST, North Carolina wants to implement document imaging in 2010 or later.

Integrated Social Services Information—North Carolina began piloting an internal computer system called the Integrated Social Services Information (ISSI) in Mecklenburg County in 2003. ISSI writes electronic case narratives that other workers can review. Staff described it is an "internal documentation communication system" that provided an opportunity for staff to share information across the department. ISSI, available to staff remotely, can also generate forms, letters, and reports for clients and staff.

Online Policy Manual—North Carolina implemented a statewide online policy manual. The manual is updated the first day of the month after a policy change is implemented.

Data-sharing

Since 2004, and as part of the overall implementation of NC FAST, North Carolina implemented the Online Verification system, OLV. Through OLV, caseworkers and reception staff have access to SNAP, Social Security, child support, DMV, employment, and revenue records. Because these databases were previously in separate systems, staff estimated that they saved 30 minutes per client because of OLV. In Wake County, reception workers pull OLV information on clients and give print outs to the caseworkers before the clients meet with caseworkers. Staff reported that OLV significantly reduced the information they needed to ask for on the SNAP application and improved the overall application timeliness.

Airport Cards

Outreach workers in Mecklenburg County use laptops that can connect remotely to the DSS network. Staff noted that for Emergency SNAP clients, outstationed workers can turn on benefits off-site, and that everything needed for the interview process can be accessed online.

Partnering Arrangements

Partnerships mostly occur at the county level in North Carolina. At the state level, there were MOUs with food banks for outreach and referrals. State DSS staff noted that in FY 09, approximately $3 million dollars was appropriated to food banks state wide, for outreach, referrals, and general support. Moreover, DSS began pilots in three counties to train food bank staff to assist with applications and to explain eligibility requirements. In 2009, DSS began working on its first formal state nutrition outreach plan, in which partners will play a reportedly significant role. As part of the plan, DSS was considering partnerships with food banks, the Division of Aging, the Employment Security Division, the Mexican Consulate, and the Department of Public Instruction, possibly targeting counties with the lowest participation rates.

In Mecklenburg County, in addition to outstationing its workers in partner agencies, DSS held four forums in 2008 with community-based partners to develop strategic plans based on their concerns about DSS services. Mecklenburg's DSS contracts with multiple CBOs to help with applications. Contracts are awarded based on the number of approved applications submitted by partners. Two partners in 2009, the Salvation Army and HOPE, were authorized representatives and could complete and submit applications on behalf of clients.

In Wake County, partnerships were informal and based on educating the population about SNAP and nutrition assistance. DSS staff went to community organization events for Veterans, Project Stand Down, and Project Homeless Connect to provide information and application assistance. At these events, staff used network access and laptops and were able to complete the entire application process for clients. Previously, DSS outstationed a worker at Urban Ministries, a local food bank that contributed 50 percent of the outstationed worker's salary and an office for

the worker to meet with clients and conduct interviews. This position was eliminated in 2009, due to staff shortages and a lack of funding.

Outcomes Tracked

State DSS staff provided counties with reports on FNS required information and QC data, but very little additional information was tracked on specific county or state level modernization outcomes. Outcomes to modernization efforts were primarily tracked on the local level. Mecklenburg County, in partnership with the state DSS office, ran return on investment (ROI) studies for its ISSI system in 2007, and for its document imaging pilot in 2009, and also conducted customer satisfaction surveys annually to a random sample of clients. Moreover, Mecklenburg closely tracked which applications were coming from community partners and how many of those were approved.

Wake County tracked its call center closely, monitoring the number of incoming calls, the amount of time on hold, the number of calls that were dropped while on hold, and the average length of time spent talking with staff. In addition, Wake County staff closely monitors its client demographic information to ensure adequate staff levels for non-English-speaking clients. Like Mecklenburg County, Wake County also conducted customer satisfaction surveys; however, they were not given on a regular basis.

Challenges

State and county officials noted a number of general challenges for their modernization efforts, including: the economy, staff turnover, staff resistance, and system integration.

The economy reportedly caused a number of problems for modernization initiatives. First, staff reported that a general hiring freeze, coupled with a significant increase in the size and complexity of the caseloads, left little time new efforts. In addition, current efforts were put on hold as staff were diverted from planning and implementation to client services.

Staff turnover, which reportedly lessened slightly during the downturn in the economy, slowed implementation efforts and proved to be costly for local DSS offices. High turnover meant more training, the loss of valuable institutional knowledge, and sometimes higher error rates. Staff also reported that turnover could be spurred by modernization initiatives, as some staff chose to leave rather than embrace new polices or unfamiliar technology. This general resistance proved to be a significant barrier to implementing certain initiatives.

System integration, especially with statewide initiatives, made both technological and policy modernization efforts difficult. Any statewide changes to the application process had to be reconciled with the various MIS and case manager systems in each county. In addition, SNAP changes did not always align with other benefit programs and caused staff and client confusion.

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

North Carolina noted success in several areas, each reportedly due, in part or in whole, to a modernization initiative. Areas include: efficiency, planning, access, and accuracy.

Staff noted significant gains in efficiency from initiatives like OLV, where eligibility workers reportedly saved approximately 30 minutes per client. Document imaging also caused a reduction in overall paper and duplicated forms, and saved staff time in tracking down information. Mecklenburg's ROI study also found that document imaging released office space, reduced costs for transporting files, reduced training needs (the imaging software made some forms automatic), and guaranteed recovery of all files.

For the larger statewide initiatives like NC FAST, DSS attributed much of its success at keeping the project on track to its planning process. This was true of policy changes as well. By using a committee or workgroup structure for the planning and approval process that incorporated both local and state staff, DSS ensured some degree of buy-in from all levels and, for projects like NC FAST, a level of dedication that could keep an initiative alive during periods of low financing or leadership changes. While the committee structure sometimes slowed the process, staff also reported it ensured that changes would not be rushed into without consideration of how the change might affect different NC Counties.

Mecklenburg County reported that its administrative changes were highly successful in terms of increasing access. Staff reported that they were serving 118.5 percent of the eligible population, based on 2000 census counts. The County DSS office opened another center on the west side of town so clients would no longer have to come to one location, and staff used call centers and community based organizations to increase the number of available points of entry into the DSS system.

For the past five years, North Carolina has received bonus money for accuracy and timeliness. Some staff attributed their success almost entirely to specialized workers who only deal with TANF and SNAP cases, and are thus able to become experts. Others found that initiatives like OLV, online policy manuals, and simplified policy options, significantly helped both the timeliness and the accuracy of the program.

Future Plans

As mentioned, NC FAST was the focus of North Carolina's current and future modernization efforts. At the time of this study, the first two phases of NC FAST had been rolled out: OLV in 2004, and SDI in 2006. Expansion of the SDI system will take place in the coming years. The new automated case management system, the last phase of the project, was approved and a software contract was awarded to Cúram Software in 2008. Another RFP was issued for someone to integrate the software into the current system, with an award expected in 2009. Staff noted that full implementation would likely begin in 2010, and finish in roughly 2014, implementing the initiative in three counties and then the eight regions.

It is planned that NC FAST will remove duplication of documents and client information over multiple programs, by combining program systems, including child care, energy assistance, SNAP, Medicaid, Refugee Assistance, Special Assistance, and TANF.

NC FAST will also automate much of the application process using document imaging, OLV, and the new case management software. As part of the plan, caseworkers will begin to offer more services, thus changing the business process for most NC DSS SNAP caseworkers who generally only administer TANF and SNAP.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
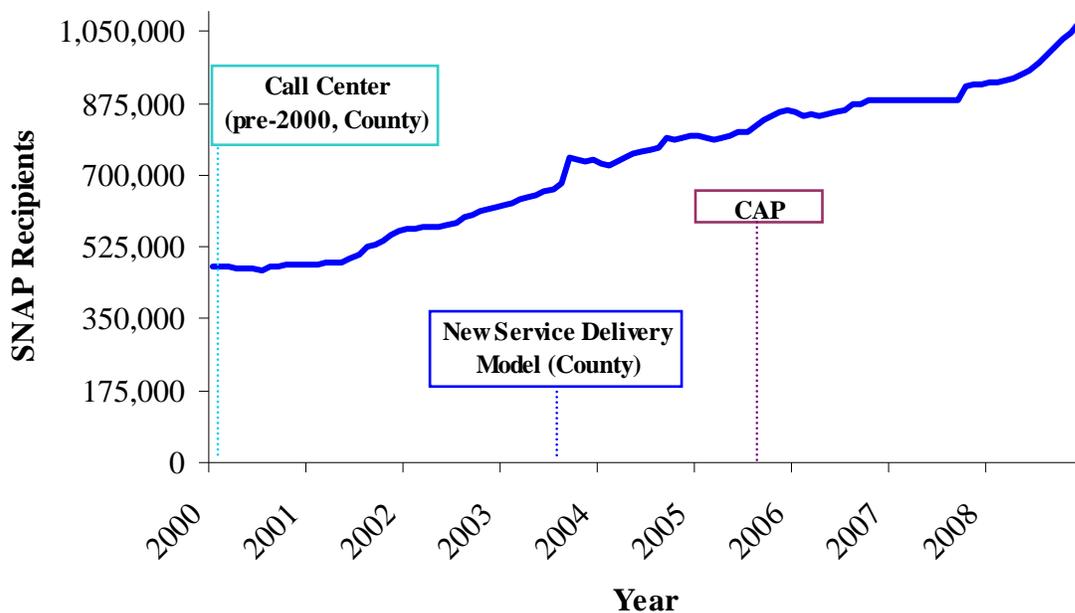
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services, Economic and Family Services, Raleigh, NC (state office)
Wake County Department of Social Services, Raleigh, NC (local office)
Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services, Charlotte, NC (local office—phone interview)
May 2009

PENNSYLVANIA CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

In an effort to increase customer access and improve customer service while simultaneously experiencing staffing reductions and increasing caseloads, Pennsylvania is implementing a series of modernization efforts that will "reconfigure workflow, document and information management and office layout to maximize the use of technology and available staff resources." Many of these changes are not limited to SNAP but are part of an effort to improve service delivery for multiple public benefits programs. These efforts, described below, include: implementation of a number of policy changes and waivers to simplify requirements for customers; organizational changes including redesign of the office process to increase on-site and off-site entry points and to improve customer service; technological innovations such as call centers, an electronic application, document imaging and scanning, online manuals, data-sharing and a workload management system; and partnering arrangements with community-based organizations that assist with the application process.

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➤ State-Administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):**
> ➤ 1,187,822 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➤ 2008 Unemployment: 5.4%
> ➤ Hiring Freeze
> ➤ Staffing Reductions
> ➤ Budget Cuts
> ➤ Geographic diversity across counties from very rural to major urban centers.

Organizational Structure

Pennsylvania's Office of Income Maintenance (OIM), housed within the Department of Public Welfare, administers SNAP as well as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), General Assistance (GA) Medicaid/Medical Assistance (MA) and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). OIM, with approximately 7000 staff statewide, is responsible for developing, updating and overseeing program policies, procedures and program operations implemented in 95 County Assistance Offices (CAOs) and affiliated District Offices located in 67 counties. Six regional management areas are overseen by area directors. Local office staff are state employees.

Because OIM administers multiple public assistance benefit programs, efforts are made to align policies and processes across these programs. As a state-administered program, the state sets policies and regulations and provides guidance to the CAOs, but the local offices have some flexibility in developing specific procedures for processing applications and delivering services. Communication from the state to the local offices regarding SNAP policy and procedures changes is delivered through operational memos and policy clarifications posted on the IMA intranet and online policy manuals. In addition to regular state and area management meetings, workgroups on specific changes policy and procedural changes are held regularly.

Service Delivery Structure

As described in more detail below, one of the key components of Pennsylvania's modernization effort is a multi-phase, comprehensive restructuring of the intake and ongoing case processing system, referred to as the 'Modern Office.' Because implementation of this process was ongoing at the time of site visits, there was some variation across CAOs in the way cases were handled. Some offices (e.g., Scranton) employed a more traditional intake model in which one worker is responsible for a case until it is certified. Other offices (e.g., Snyder District Office in Philadelphia) are piloting new systems where intake tasks are divided among staff with different assigned duties. In general, workers are tri-functional, handling SNAP, TANF, and MA cases.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

Efforts to modernize SNAP were motivated by interest in improving customer access and participation in benefits programs at a time when the state was experiencing staffing cutbacks and increased workload. OIM has lost approximately 100 positions per year since 2000. Staff noted that they have been challenged to devise strategies to "do more with less" and develop more efficient and streamlined strategies. The driving force behind these efforts was primarily the SNAP agency (OIM), spurred on initially in no small part by the concerns regarding waiting times and other customer service issues in the Philadelphia District offices expressed by community partners and advocates. The availability of new technology, discussions with other states more advanced in their modernization activities, examination of private industry business processes, and input from staff and customers helped the state define the specific efforts that best met Pennsylvania's needs. State staff noted that support from the governor has also been an important motivation for implementation of modernization activities; other staff also cited the desire to reduce administrative costs and improve error rates as a factor.

In terms of specific initiatives, the online application, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Application for Public Assistance (COMPASS), was developed in 2001 as a way to increase access to healthcare for children; the SNAP component was added soon after. Call centers were implemented as a strategy to address continuity of operations across county lines after floods closed local CAOs and interrupted service delivery for clients in need.

Key Goals or Outcomes

A vision statement for the modernization process implemented in Pennsylvania outlined four overarching goals: (1) to increase and improve customer service, making it easier for customers to apply for and receive benefits; (2) to improve the work environment for staff; (3) to better use technology; and (4) to develop greater fiscal and performance accountability through better business practices. Another related goal noted by state staff is to align policies and procedures, streamline and simplify processes, and implement best practices across programs.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

Because Pennsylvania's modernization activities have focused on ways to improve customer access and service, the state has concentrated on efforts that help eliminate the need for

individuals to visit the local office and decrease the amount of office wait times. These early efforts began with the launch of the online application in 2001 and then moved on to pilots to restructure the "front-end" administrative function, establish call centers and waive face-to-face interviews.

Pennsylvania's planning process for modernization benefited from its long history of close linkages and ongoing communication with staff, numerous community partners and advocacy organizations. The state office established a number of committees and workgroups that met regularly to solicit input and feedback from state, regional, and local staff, various community stakeholders, and clients on proposed changes. For example, the Income Maintenance Advisory Committee (IMAC) is comprised of advocates and clients who meet quarterly to review policies, propose changes, and make recommendations. A 15-person operational review committee also meets to obtain feedback from local offices on all proposed program changes. Other workgroups were convened to study industry practices and new technology, consult with other states, work closely with contractors and weigh the impacts of specific modernization efforts (e.g., COMPASS) on the agency, workers, clients, and the budget. One state staff member noted, "The better the stakeholder group, the better the end product." Input from other states with experience launching similar modernization efforts was also important during the planning stages.

The state has adopted an incremental approach for implementing new modernization efforts. Most modernization activities are first piloted in one or two CAOs and then tweaked and modified based on review of outcomes and feedback from staff and customers before rollout by area. For example, the first version of Modern Office piloted in York County was discontinued because the technology was not yet available to successfully monitor and track the transfer of cases from the intake workers to the ongoing workers. After re-tooling the strategy and adding an automated work management system ("Worker Dashboard"), the revised approach was piloted in other sites. Staff noted that having state project managers in the field meeting with local directors and staff to "hand-hold" and help with buy-in during early rollout was key to the success of new initiatives. More comprehensive initiatives such as the Modern Office have been initiated in phases, separated by six months to a year, to allow time for staff to work through the kinks related to one set of changes before adding other major changes. Implementation of the electronic application has been ongoing since 2001 as new modifications and upgrades are continually made to make the tool more user-friendly.

Modernization Efforts

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

➢ **Waiver of the Face-to-Face Interview at Recertification**. Pennsylvania applied for and was granted a waiver of the face-to-face interview at recertification in 2006.

➢ **Waiver of the Face-to-Face Interview at Application.** Pennsylvania was granted a waiver of the face-to-face interview at initial certification in 2009.

➢ **Expanded Categorical Eligibility.** In October 2008, Pennsylvania expanded categorical eligibility to households that receive services funded with TANF money, therefore eliminating the SNAP resource test. Previously, the resource limit was $2000 per person or $3000 for elderly and disabled. Households with gross income below 160 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines (200 percent for elderly or disabled households) are eligible for a TANF-funded brochure that confers categorical eligibility for SNAP.

➢ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.** Pennsylvania switched to a 12-month reporting period for elderly and disabled households with a 24-month certification period. Households with a 12-month certification period have a 6-month reporting period.

➢ **Simplified Standard Utility Allowance.** Pennsylvania implemented four mandatory SUAs—heating, non-heating, limited, and telephone.

➢ **Expanded Vehicle Exemption.** This policy is aligned with TANF; at least one vehicle is excluded.

➢ **Combined Application Project**. Pennsylvania implemented a five-year Combined Application Program (CAP) Demonstration in 2007, in an effort to bring more elderly and disabled members of the eligible SNAP population on to the rolls. Eligible SSI participants must live alone or purchase and prepare meals separately from other household members. A standard shelter allowance is used.

➢ **Census Income.** Pennsylvania received approval for a Demonstration Project to exclude earned income from household members that are temporarily employed in the 2010 Census.

➢ **Transitional Benefits Alternative (TBA).** Pennsylvania expanded eligibility for TBA to include the majority of households leaving TANF.

The state implemented a 24-month certification period for elderly/disabled households in 2006. Pennsylvania also has a simplified, combined application.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

Pennsylvania is in the process of implementing a multi-phase, multi-component major restructuring of the service delivery system for SNAP and other benefits called Modern Office. Using the flexibility afforded them by waivers and other policy changes and maximizing new technology such as the electronic application, call centers and automated work management systems, the state is rolling out a new approach to providing services that focuses on improved customer access and services and increased efficiencies. The concept was first tested in pilot CAOs (including Philadelphia) in 2005 but was then retooled and implemented statewide in its current form in 2008. Although there is some variation in the way the model was implemented

across CAOs, the first phase completed in Spring 2008, focused on the "front end" services available to a customer. Restructuring in the local offices included creation of a self-service reception area with a stand-alone COMPASS kiosk, direct phone lines to the call center, direct phone lines to the EBT contractor for card pinning, scanning and copying equipment (in some cases), a drop off box, and an instructional video and informational brochures. The biggest change under this new model was a shift from scheduled appointments to a walk-in application process, dramatically decreasing the wait time in local offices. This was accomplished with the addition of one or more Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) in the reception area. The CSR, an eligibility worker, is available to meet immediately with new and existing clients without appointments to answer questions, take information, address changes, verify documentation, provide application assistance and troubleshoot as needed. In most offices, new applicants can be referred immediately to intake workers who review the application with the customer and conduct an eligibility interview. Some pilot offices are also testing a greeter position, a clerical staff member who determines the needs of customers and directs them as appropriate.

A new phase of the project (being piloted in two sites) subdivides the up-front team into CSRs, who still interface with customers but may also conduct an immediate intake process with walk-ins, and Processors, who complete the application process for the walk-ins that do not have the required documentation as well as mail-in, faxes or COMPASS applications. In the two pilot sites, customers can meet with any CSR and are not assigned to a particular worker. In other sites, such as Scranton, a new customer works with the same intake worker throughout the application process.

The "back-end" process currently being tested moves from individual ownership of a caseload to a team-based approach. This process was originally tested in York County but was abandoned because technology was not available to assign and monitor casework. However, the implementation of the work management system known as Dashboard (described below) provided the necessary tracking capability. Groups of workers are assigned specific types of tasks (e.g., recertifications), which they complete for cases as prioritized by Dashboard.

Other new processes, which have been implemented to improve customer access, include the Verification Guide, a listing of the specific types of documentation a customer needs to produce. This was developed in response to concerns that workers were asking for too much documentation. The Next Steps flyer, being piloted in two counties, tells the client what action has been taken and what the client needs to do next. Pennsylvania also offers extended hours at some offices and provides outstationed SNAP workers at community locations.

Deloitte has a contract to provide IT support to the state. As such, they work closely with the technology development team within OIM on development of new programs and systems.

Technological Innovations

Call Centers

Pennsylvania currently operates nine customer service or call centers; eight that serve the

entire state and one dedicated to Philadelphia County. A key component of the Modern Office concept, customer service centers (formerly called change centers) are housed in CAOs and staffed by 102 IMA eligibility workers who can provide information about SNAP and other programs, take information on changes in circumstances and report on case status to customers. One center is dedicated to Spanish speaking clients. Prior to the implementation of call centers in 2006, caseworkers in many offices did not have voice mail (or voice mail boxes were full), forcing customers to leave messages with a designated clerical staff member who served a cluster of workers. A customer can access the customer service centers by calling a toll-free number—either from their own phone, a direct line in the reception area of most local offices, or a transfer from a CAO direct line. Callers are routed to workers who complete tickets on the actions taken which are then routed to appropriate staff via the worker dashboard system for further action, if required.

Staff reported that plans were to shift to a more regionalized model in July 2009 to accommodate increased workload and reduced staff. Neither applications nor recertifications are currently processed at the call centers, but staff reported that they were "heading in that direction." At the time of the site visit, the customer service centers were taking approximately 30,000 calls a week and reporting a 57 percent completion rate (i.e., the call was satisfied). Information about COMPASS is provided during the hold message.

Electronic Applications and Online Tools

One of the first states to implement an electronic application, Pennsylvania launched COMPASS in 2001 to provide an additional medium for people who can't come into a CAO during normal business hours to apply for benefits. The first program available on the application was healthcare for children; SNAP, TANF and other healthcare programs were subsequently added. The original version of the application is written for a 6th grade reading level and includes a significant amount of guidance in the text. In 2003, a condensed "power version" of COMPASS with about 10 percent of the original version's pages was created based on feedback from community partners. This version allows the community partner to track the approval of submitted applications. Applications are automatically routed to the correct CAO or District Office. Once moved from a pending queue, they are imported to prepopulate the eligibility sections on the mainframe.

Workers in the local office verify the information and can then print out a hard copy of the application for their records. Verifications can be completed through automatic requests to other administrative systems (e.g., criminal justice.); a "hit" or match will result in a message posted on the worker's dashboard (described below.) Applicants are then contacted by telephone for an application interview to complete the process. Some local office staff noted that the current customer version of the COMPASS application is not user-friendly, estimating that it takes approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete. At the time of the site visit, efforts were underway to roll out an improved version. Currently, approximately 20 percent of all applications (not limited to SNAP) are submitted online; this number has been increasing over time.

The My COMPASS feature also increases program access by allowing a customer to

create an online account to review their benefits, check their payment cycle, current benefit amount and to report changes online.

Paperless Systems

Although moving in the direction of an electronic record keeping system, Pennsylvania does not yet have fully electronic cases—they hope to have a totally paperless system in all CAOs as part of the final phase of the Modern Office in 2011. Most CAOs are in the process of scanning and imaging all documents for new customers at intake and providing customers with the ability to scan verification documents (or have them scanned) and receive a receipt in the reception area. However, because of budget constraints, all offices do not yet have adequate scanning equipment; staff in one local site also noted that scanning is still very time-consuming because scanned documents still have to be attached to a case record manually. Consequently, most offices still keep paper copies of required documents.

Pennsylvania has had online policy manuals (which are also available on the public web site) since 2000. They also use the Internet to share operational memos and policy clarifications.

Data-sharing

The state's Income Eligibility Verification System (IEVS) can access data and search for matches from 11 different sources, including, for example, social security, the state Department of Labor and Industry database, and lottery winnings.

Other Technological Innovations

Pennsylvania has adopted a strategic "incremental renewal" approach to updating its information technology systems, phasing out its older mainframe for web-based applications. The goal is to strategically shift specific applications to move forward so they can keep up with new technology and user needs, while supporting what policy dictates. The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare also has a user-friendly informational web site with quick links to information about all benefits programs, access to COMPASS and links to policy manuals.

The work management system, Dashboard, was implemented statewide in 2009 after a year-long rollout period. Dashboard allows for assignment and tracking of work tasks from the Customer Service Centers as well as supervisors. Alerts are sent to workers with prioritized assignments for each day. Staff feel that Dashboard has had a major impact on productivity and workload management.

Partnering Arrangements

Pennsylvania issued an RFP and selected approximately 20 community organizations to receive $75,000 each to conduct outreach and help customers use COMPASS to apply for SNAP benefits. These organizations, including the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger, have access to the power version of COMPASS, which allows users to track applications. They also assist OIM by providing feedback on SNAP policies and procedures in general and the customer

version of COMPASS in particular. In addition, hundreds of unfunded community partners use power COMPASS to assist customers with the application process. OIM has also provided training to Department of Labor and Industry staff to enable them to assist individuals who apply for SNAP benefits through the COMPASS link on their web site.

Outcomes Tracked

At the state level, Pennsylvania tracks and monitors a variety of different outcome measures to use in assessing the success of its modernization activities. For example, the state, which has seen a dramatic decrease in their error rate in the past few years, is continuing to closely monitor the rate for changes that might be related to implementation of customer service centers. The state produces "effective management reports" that provide data on, for example, accuracy, timeliness, participation rates, application approval and rejection rates, renewal processing rates, and customer satisfaction. They also track customer satisfaction by monitoring comments received through their hotline and telephone and letter correspondence received by the governor's office and OIM.

CAOs also track customer service through surveys at the county level. Use of COMPASS by individuals and by community partners for completing applications, wait times at the customer service centers and in person at the lobby in CAOS are also monitored. The new worker Dashboard system has been an important tracking tool, allowing staff to monitor the number and timing of pending applications and the number of approvals and denials. The state also tracks participation measures for specific subpopulations, such as the elderly, to gain information that will help in devising strategies to target this population. Demographic information on all CAP participants is collected and reviewed.

While most data are collected at the state level, targeted information is collected at the local office level for pilot programs. For example, in Philadelphia, the greeters have a data base which tracks the number of customers seen, the reason for the visit and the time spent in the reception area. Use of the Rushmore case review system also allows supervisors to conduct individual case reviews for errors and trends.

Challenges

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges to successful implementation of modernization activities is the difficulty in making programmatic and operational changes with reduced staff. The current hiring freeze coupled with recent retirements and the budget cutbacks mean that fewer staff are dealing with a larger workload as participation in SNAP has increased. Another important challenge is the struggle to "change the culture" among workers at all levels. Administrators noted that many long-term staff push back on proposed changes, particularly those that require staff to change their existing mindsets. For example, many staff fought efforts to eliminate requirements for in-person contact with customers; they felt that the face-to-face interaction is an important component of their jobs. Others were wary of having other staff (i.e., customer service center or CAO customer service representatives) work with "their" cases. One administrator reported that the biggest obstacle to modernization is "selling new ideas to the

field." She tried to address this problem through daily contact with all staff via e-mail and weekly contact with local managers.

The opposition to changes expressed by worker unions presents another challenge. Unions representing agency workers are particularly active and strong in Pennsylvania. They are suspicious of efforts to streamline and simplify processes, fearing elimination of jobs because of new technology. State staff stressed the importance of bringing the union leadership into discussions early to secure their cooperation and support for any new changes.

Some staff noted that older colleagues had more difficulty making the transition to new technology such as the worker Dashboard, although this problem has been somewhat mitigated by a recent wave of retirements. Specifically, staff identified a number of challenges related to the shift to scanning and document imaging, mostly related to an insufficient number of machines and outdated equipment that needed to be upgraded when new funding became available. In addition, the process for linking scanned documents to existing applications and case files is reportedly cumbersome.

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

Overall, state administrators felt the organizational structure of their agency, with responsibility for policy and programmatic decision-making for multiple public assistance benefits housed together, contributed greatly to the success of their modernization activities. They thought that it was crucial to be able to align policies and service delivery processes across multiple programs (i.e., SNAP, TANF, and MA) and consider the impacts of changes to one program on another. State staff also felt that being state-administered was key to their success in implementing new initiatives. Because they believe that "policy drives systems," state staff felt that implementation of new policy options and the receipt of waivers were their greater accomplishments because they were instrumental in simplifying the eligibility process, making it easier to access benefits and increasing efficiency.

Improvement in customer service was considered a major success by state and local staff, who noted that customer wait times in the offices had decreased. One staff member, citing quicker and more accurate applications processing with the new customer services model, felt that this success made it difficult to justify requests for additional staff. A number of staff pointed to the success of the worker dashboard system, noting that it "made things easier" for both the worker and the customer, particularly the automated renewal notifications sent out by the state office. Scanning and document imaging were considered to be successes but many staff noted that better technology was needed for scanning and for an automatic link between the scanned document and a case record.

State and local staff shared a number of lessons learned regarding implementation of modernization efforts. They recommended soliciting the input and drawing on the expertise and advice of colleagues in other states who had launched similar efforts. In addition, they stressed the importance of obtaining the commitment of top agency officials, involving community partners and the relevant stakeholders, and keeping all local managers informed from the onset to secure their buy-in before rolling out new activities. As noted above, state staff felt that it was

important to assign on site project mangers to support and "hand-hold" local staff when new efforts were being implemented. One state administrator noted that fear of failure should not make states reluctant to pilot and test new initiatives. This administrator cautioned against continuing with archaic, cumbersome programs "just because you're a government agency" noting that "this [OIM] is not your grandmother's welfare department anymore." In terms of working with contractors, staff advised keeping consultants involved in meetings and all ongoing conversations about changes but "staying on top" of them to ensure that "you're running the show and not them." Finally, staff advised that modernization planners decide what they want their program to look like in the future, develop the appropriate business plan and then develop the business processes needed to accomplish it.

Future Plans

As described above, future plans include statewide implementation of the final phases of the Modern Office model to all local offices, incorporating full implementation of the service model and expanding and upgrading scanning and imaging to all local offices with an eventual goal of fully electronic case files. Other plans include continual upgrades and enhancements to COMPASS to make it more user-friendly, including creation of a link to ensure that customers applying for TANF/SNAP online are categorically eligible for free and reduced lunch. Additionally, there were plans to work closely with the Department of Aging's prescription assistance program to create automatic enrollment program for SNAP.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
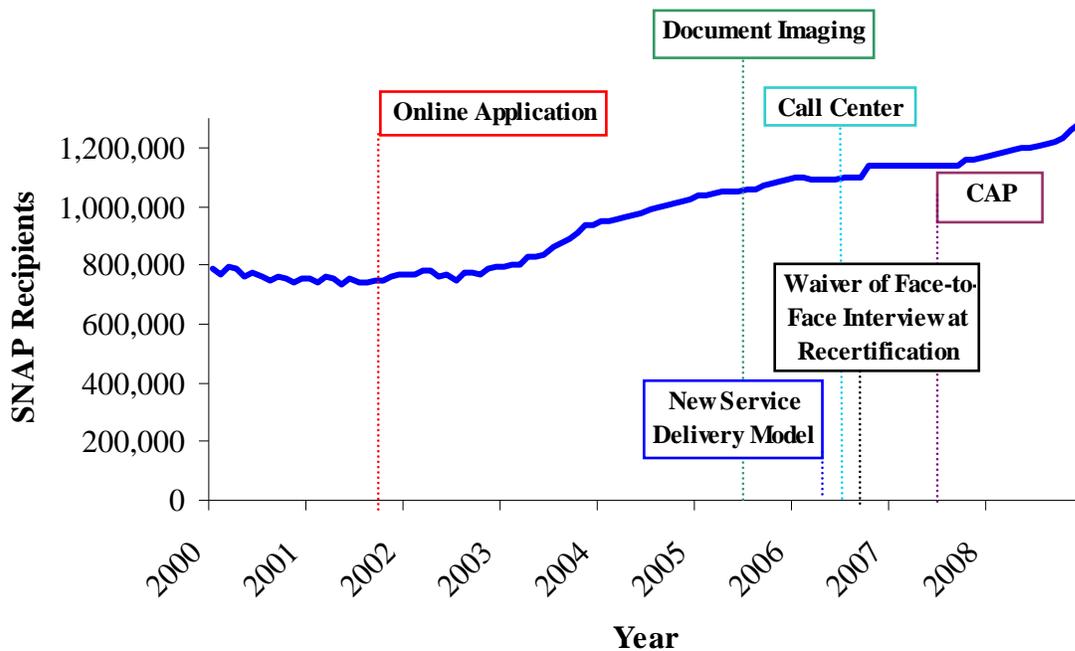
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Department of Public Welfare, Office of Income Maintenance, Harrisburg. PA (state office)
Lackawanna County Office, Scranton, PA (local office)
Snyder District Office, Philadelphia, PA (local office)
March 2009

TEXAS CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

Modernization efforts in Texas are largely legislatively-driven. The state has been in the process of replacing outdated legacy computer systems with the Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System (TIERS) since 2003. In addition, Texas has obtained waivers to improve client access, implemented call centers, document processing centers and document imaging, and outsourced services.

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➢ State-Administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):**
> ➢ 2,532,047 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➢ 2008 Unemployment: 4.9%
> ➢ State legislature controls program funding and directs decisions related to outsourcing and modernization
> ➢ Increased caseload
> ➢ Staffing shortages

Organizational Structure

SNAP is administered by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). In 2003, the Texas legislature mandated a transformation of the state's health and human services system to facilitate integrated services, consolidating 12 agencies into 5. HHSC oversees the operations of the health and human services system, provides administrative oversight of health and human services programs, and provides direct administration of some programs. In addition to SNAP, HHSC administers: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and several Family and Community Services such as Family Violence Services and Refugee Services.

Texas has a state-administered system, with its 254 counties organized into 11 regions. Employees in local HHSC eligibility services offices are state employees. TANF and Medicaid are administered together with SNAP. The state outsources CHIP eligibility determination, operations, and enrollment.

Service Delivery Structure

There are 311 local HHSC eligibility services offices across the state. For the most part, workers are "generic," meaning that they are trained to determine eligibility and manage cases for Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF. However, some local eligibility services offices have specialized units where staff only work on one program, such as TANF, which has more complicated rules.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

Modernization, specifically privatization, was mandated by the State legislature, and included outsourcing work and implementing call centers. In 2003, the Texas Legislature passed legislation that directed HHSC to examine ways to streamline the process of determining eligibility for programs such as CHIP, Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF. The direction came at a

time of reduced state revenues and budgets, and the legislation required HHSC to examine new options for serving clients more efficiently. HHSC was directed to evaluate whether call centers would be cost-effective for the eligibility and enrollment process and to contract with a private vendor to operate the call center unless it was determined to not be cost-effective. The intent of TIERS and other modernization activities was to improve client access and integration of human services programs in order to achieve efficiencies and reduce costs.

Key Goals or Outcomes

The state's primary goals for modernization include reducing costs, increasing customer access, and simplifying the application and eligibility determination processes through TIERS computer systems.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

Texas was an early entrant into modernization. Beginning with passage of the state's welfare reform legislation in 1995, Texas has focused on integrating eligibility processes across programs and outsourcing administrative functions. Original plans to privatize were scaled back when, in 1997, federal officials ruled that SNAP and Medicaid eligibility decisions could not be outsourced. Subsequent modernization initiatives still involve the same principals of system redesign, outsourcing, and cost savings, but have been scaled back with respect to both the extent of privatization and speed of implementation.

In 2003, the Texas legislature authorized the use of privately run call centers as part of a strategy to address state budget cuts to health and human services programs. In 2004, HHSC initiated plans to modernize and privatize the eligibility and enrollment system through the use of call centers and began preparing TIERS to support the new integrated eligibility and enrollment system. The service delivery model using call centers was implemented in 2006. An eligibility and enrollment contract with a private organization was cancelled in 2007, which delayed the call center expansion, but HHSC has continued to roll out TIERS, by adding new programs and pursuing a limited geographic expansion. The geographic expansion was approved by FNS, but with a limit on the number of SNAP cases that could be converted to TIERS, because HHSC was having difficulties meeting federal performance standards.

Each modernization change involves design input and testing by state staff and contractor staff. Since the system is integrated for SNAP, Medicaid, and TANF, stakeholders across the HHSC enterprise are involved (e.g., Office of the Inspector General, Office of Civil Rights, Family Services, and Eligibility Services). The first state testing for TIERS began in 2001. Implementation of the call centers in 2006 was preceded by a full year of gathering business requirements, mapping, and planning. State staff was involved in design sessions and policy decisions as well as testing.

Ongoing modernization initiatives in Texas build on TIERS implementation, the evolving functions of call centers, and improved technology for client access and case management.

Budget cuts and concerns about privatization have resulted in loss of institutional knowledge due to staff turnover, and fewer state staff. Contract performance issues have also been a concern, and current efforts are aimed at improving specification of vendor responsibilities and contract monitoring.

Modernization Efforts

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

➢ **Waiver of Face-to-Face Interviews at Initial Certification and Recertification.** The state obtained a SNAP waiver of face-to-face interviews for recertification in 2003-04, and in early 2009, submitted a request to FNS to waive face-to-face interviews for applications.

➢ **Use of Data Broker to Verify Certain Eligibility Points and Obtain Other Relevant Case Information.** HHSC has used a contracted data broker service to obtain eligibility-related information for more than 10 years. HHSC has expanded that system in recent years to use Texas Department of Public Safety data to verify identity and residence. HHSC recently had the vendor modify the system to interface with the Texas Workforce Commission for data on wages and unemployment benefits and is developing a similar process to obtain relevant child support data from the State's child support agency.

➢ **Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility.** Texas implemented expanded categorical eligibility for SNAP in 2002, using a $5,000 asset limit. The only countable assets are liquid assets and vehicles; and Texas uses an expanded vehicle exemption that exempts an additional vehicle with a fair market value less than $15,000.

➢ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.** Texas implemented SNAP simplified reporting with six-month certification periods in 2002. HHSC indicates that they continue to seek ways to lengthen certification periods. They anticipate moving everyone to simplified reporting, but this has not been accomplished because of automation challenges and continued operation of two information technology systems, TIERS and the legacy system.

➢ **Simplified Standard Medical Expense Deduction.** Texas implemented a standard medical expense deduction in 2002 under a demonstration waiver. This waiver was renewed in 2008.

➢ **Combined Application Project (CAP).** HHSC has received approval from FNS to transfer SNAP recipients who are CAP-eligible to the SNAP-CAP program. There is very little effort involved in certifying and recertifying this population because the information is available from their SSI files and eligibility updates do not require a lot of manual input. HHSC also lowered the CAP qualifying age from 65 to 50. This

SNAP-CAP was a demonstration waiver project, started in 2002, and the age was lowered as part of the waiver renewal process.

➢ **Three-year certification period for SNAP-SSI cases.** For SNAP cases in which all household members receive SSI and are not in the CAP waiver caseload (about 80,000 cases). HHSC is approved by FNS under a demonstration waiver to assign a 36-month certification to these cases, and SNAP eligibility or benefit updates are made automatically each month based on data updates from the Social Security Administration's SDX system.

➢ **Use of Texas Workforce Center wage data as proof of earned income.** HHSC recently implemented a policy to allow staff to verify earned income using quarterly wage data from the state employment agency in situations in which that data are determined to be representative of anticipated income. Analysis indicates this may reduce the need to delay eligibility for other sources of verification of wages by 50 percent.

➢ **Allowing Community Based Organizations (CBO) to Conduct the SNAP Interview.** HHSC was recently approved by FNS for a demonstration waiver to allow food bank CBOs to conduct the SNAP interview as part of their application assistance.

Texas has also implemented simplified, combined application forms.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

Texas has been working to streamline the application process and expand the number of places and methods available to apply for benefits. Efforts are underway to redesign the application form, TIERS-generated forms, and the renewal form. Clients can seek information and apply for benefits in-person, by phone, mail, or fax, or through HHSC web sites using the Internet.

All workers have access to a language line for language translation during appointments. The language line provides translation for Spanish and other languages.

HHSC has an outstationed worker program. Hospitals and clinics may contract with the state to place state workers at locations where an individual can apply for any of the services administered by HHSC. In Austin, at least one of the local eligibility services offices has a worker that goes to group homes two times a week to obtain and process applications.

Under a pilot directed by legislation, HHSC partnered with a grocery store in chain in Corpus Christi to outstation state eligibility workers at the store two days per week to take applications. The pilot was not continued or expanded due to very low use of state staff by grocery store visitors.

Process Reengineering

Texas has been involved in process re-engineering for well over a decade. Change centers, a forerunner to the current call centers, were started in 1996. There has been a major shift from in-person to telephone interviews in the last six to seven years.

Process reengineering is ongoing and focuses on redefining the role of vendors and state staff, improving client access, and increasing efficiency. Key elements include: transferring routine functions to less expensive vendor staff; identifying the functions that require more detailed program knowledge and judgment and organizing process flow so those functions can be routed to state staff in a timely manner; and using document imaging and automation to facilitate eligibility determination and reduce client and staff documentation burden.

More recent enhancement efforts are aimed at simplifying TIERS as much as possible for eligibility workers in order to decrease the amount of data entry, and streamlining the interview process.

Workload/Task-Based Model

Workload is distributed to the state workers in the state-operated call center, known as the customer care center. Cases are routed to each state caseworker based on alphabetical "alpha" assignment to ensure consistency between the worker and cases. Each worker is responsible for managing the assigned caseload in a timely and accurate manner. Tasks are distributed on a daily basis to each worker via an Excel spreadsheet. Distributed tasks include all tasks queued for cases worked on the previous business day and include tasks not accomplished on previous days. In addition, state customer care center staff receive calls transferred from the vendor-operated call center. State clerical staff log the calls and transfer them to the appropriate caseworker. State staff also provide support to the vendor via the state support phone queue. The vendor-operated call center and state staff housed in the customer care center take calls from 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.

The process is similar for local eligibility services offices. A task list is sent out to supervisors who then send task lists to each of the workers in their unit. Local eligibility services office workers conduct interviews by phone and face-to-face, work on their task lists, and have to see everyone in the office, including those getting EBT cards, before the end of the day.

Regular hours for state workers in local eligibility services offices are 8 am to 5 pm.

Contracting out Administrative Functions

Texas uses contractors for document processing that includes handling inbound mail, answering basic eligibility and application questions (such as required documentation needed), processing documents into electronic document images, using automated systems to associate document images to cases, and scheduling client interview appointments for the local eligibility offices. Programming and maintenance of TIERS is also contracted out.

Technological Innovations

Call Centers

Texas HHSC operates two types of call centers for TIERS cases: customer care centers and vendor-operated call centers that provide eligibility support services (ESS). Customer care centers and ESS call centers are co-located. The call centers have no lobby — everything at these centers arrives by telephone, mail, fax, or Internet.

There are four locations in the state (Midland, Athens, San Antonio, and Austin). These centers create an infrastructure to support a more modern system. They answered more than 2 million calls from Texans in fiscal year 2008 and provide assistance until 8 p.m. during the week as an added convenience for low-income workers. Each center is different and configured to support the work done at the center. For example, in the Austin call center there are vendor staff, but they do not answer client calls there. In Midland, vendor staff answer client calls, documents are processed and imaged in Midland for all TIERS cases in the state, and recertifications for all TIERS cases are sent from one central location in Midland.

Vendor-operated ESS call centers: The vendor call center is a point of access for the public through a statewide toll-free "211" number. The Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system is the entry method to obtain information and to apply for programs administered by HHSC. The vendor staffs the call centers and is limited in scope to answering inquiries, providing information, taking complaints, transferring calls and routing tasks to escalation units and state staff, and scheduling client interview appointments.

Customer care centers: The state customer care centers are co-located with the vendor-operated ESS call centers and staffed by state workers to provide assistance for calls presenting situations that vendor staff cannot address. State staff at customer care centers handle case changes and eligibility determinations that do not involve an in-person interview. Eligibility is determined by state staff in the customer care center or by the state employees at local eligibility services offices.

Electronic Applications and Online Tools

Texas has a web site (www.yourtexasbenefits.com) where an individual can use "self-service" to access an electronic application anytime from anywhere in the state. Texas implemented the electronic application in phases. In February 2006, the Application for Assistance form was provided on the client Self-Service Portal web site and clients were able to complete the form online and submit it via the Internet. Upon receipt the file date was activated, but the paper form had to be mailed to the client for a physical signature. The second phase was implemented in March 2008, after the Texas legislature authorized acceptance of electronic signatures and HHSC policy was changed to accept the client's electronic signature.

There are also tools to self-screen or assess eligibility, request an application, find answers to questions, find an HHSC benefits office, and get a referral to another program. A

client can login to apply for benefits, complete an unfinished application, check the status of an application, check the interview appointment schedule, and review current benefits. Applications can be filed on line because electronic signatures are accepted.

If the applicant is in an area that is still on the legacy system rather than TIERS, the vendor routes a hard copy of the application to the local eligibility services office for processing and eligibility determination. For those on TIERS, the vendor gets the electronic image of the application, registers it, associates it with a case, and then routes it to the customer care center or state eligibility services office for processing and eligibility determination.

An effort is under way to simplify the application and change forms. The long-term plan is to put the change form on the self-service portal so clients can report changes themselves online.

Paperless System

Everything received in the document processing center in Midland is imaged the same day it is received. TIERS includes a document image repository, which allows documents to be viewed and work moved to any worker at any location. In TIERS, the worker sees the case history by reviewing the document images. A state employee can look at previous certifications and can pull up all records for that client. If there is a disaster and one office or center is experiencing heavy workload or is not able to function, the system allows work at that particular office or center to be directed to another location.

Data-sharing

The state continues to expand its ability to obtain electronic information from third-party sources. TIERS has an interface to a data broker service, which accumulates data from private and public sources, including data from systems of other state agencies, such as unemployment compensation. The state is in the process of implementing access to child support data through the data broker. Automated electronic data-sharing helps to avoid the client being denied eligibility for failure to provide certain types of documentation. TIERS also has interfaces with other electronic systems, such as the Social Security Administration (SSA) for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Retirement, Survivors, Disability Insurance (RSDI) verifications.

Computer System for Integrated Eligibility

The Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System (TIERS) began as a pilot in 2003 in two central Texas counties. The original intent was to implement the system statewide in one year, but difficulties with the system and the contractor have limited the statewide implementation. As part of a continuing transition, HHSC programs currently use two computer systems — TIERS and a legacy system. Although the eligibility process is the same from the client's perspective, the mechanics are different for TIERS and legacy system applicants. For example, the legacy system still requires the hard copy application—the client can mail it or bring it to the local eligibility services office. TIERS system documents go to Midland where

they are imaged and processed by the vendor, and the eligibility worker can use the electronic image of the application document.

Central Texas Region 7, whose hub is in Austin, is using TIERS, but TIERS is also spreading across the state as people move and as new programs are implemented. When a household goes into TIERS, they stay in TIERS even if they move to another region. This means that staff trained in TIERS are needed in other regions of the state as well. When Texas implemented a new Medicaid waiver program for women, it built it in TIERS for the whole state. About 100,000 people are certified in this program, and this brings the whole family into TIERS. Similarly, Texas has implemented a new Foster Care program using TIERS, and this adds another 100 to 200 cases a month into TIERS.

HHSC is also working on a technology refresh project to establish more capacity in a secure data center, and the agency is also taking opportunities to improve disaster recovery capabilities. They have a system to back up information in Austin to reduce impact to clients and retailers if outages occur.

Partnering Arrangements

At the time of the Urban Institute site visit, HHSC had two contracts with community-based partners for outreach. One was a small contract with Texas Association for Community Action Agencies (TACAA) that started in 2001 and focused on five rural targeted areas. Since 2006, HHSC has contracted with the Texas Food Bank Network, which has 19 partner agencies across the state. However, as of September 1, 2009, HHSC no longer has a separate contract with TACAA for outreach—the contract has been rolled into the Texas Food Bank Network contract. The main responsibilities of the partners are outreach, application assistance, and public awareness. Working through food banks is fairly recent and is expanding. The state hopes to continue to enhance this partnership, including outreach and follow-up with the SNAP-CAP eligible population. The contracted community-based partners also work with the grocery stores in South Texas and other areas of the state. Texas also contracts with one community-based organization to specifically handle SNAP applications for the refugee program.

HHSC staff go to partner organizations and provide materials or onsite training for the partners. This includes education on the application process and on high level points pertaining to eligibility. Partners are discouraged from telling people that they are not eligible since the role of partners is not to determine eligibility, but to inform people. Materials are provided in English and Spanish. HHSC also has quarterly webinar trainings on any changes in processes, and the contracted community partners are invited to participate in these.

State respondents indicate that they have seen good numbers from the partner organizations and that participation in the program continues to climb.

Outcomes Tracked

The ESS vendor contract is performance-based. The ESS vendor self-reports Key Performance Requirements (KPRs) monthly. HHSC monitors the vendor's quality assurance in relation to the performance requirements. This includes observing and evaluating the work they do at the document processing center and call centers. The vendor receives quality scores on processing center and call center operations based on the performance benchmarks.

State staff monitor the quality of the work the contracted vendors perform. State staff members ensure documents are being imaged and associated to cases correctly, outbound documents and notices are printed appropriately, and they monitor client calls. The Program Integrity Monitoring System is used to support HHSC's quality assurance system that uses a detailed checklist/questionnaire to monitor each step of application processing, call center operations, etc. The vendor provides regular reporting on the KPRs including calls per month by topic (case or benefits status; legacy system calls, policy and procedure inquiry, change reporting, appointment rescheduling, appointment status, referral to another program, application assistance, and other), document volume by month, and document processing timeliness.

Challenges

The state has faced challenges with respect to contractor performance, budget cuts, insufficient staffing levels and staff turnover, implementation of TIERS, limitations of the local eligibility office telephone systems, natural disasters and economic changes. Some issues have been resolved with revised contract specifications and reprocurement of contracts, and technology capacity. Staffing and local eligibility office telephone limitations and increased demand for benefits and services remain issues. The challenges have resulted in performance problems, including not meeting the federal standard for timely processing of applications.

In 1995, there were 12,000 state eligibility staff; now there are about 7,000 eligibility staff. When caseloads were dropping, HHSC was able to manage with fewer staff. Staff turnover increased in response to job security concerns related to privatization. HHSC now has many new and inexperienced staff, which presents a challenge, especially now that caseloads are growing. For example, respondents indicated that it takes about seven months before a new eligibility worker is ready for a full caseload.

Phone system capacity also limits replacing face-to-face with telephone interviews. HHSC has added to the telephone systems, a further expansion is scheduled, and additional funding has been requested from the legislature.

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

An important lesson from the Texas experience is that it tried to do too much too quickly and then had to scale back. HHSC had about one year to implement the vendor-operated call centers, and, according to state respondents, this was not enough time. The assumption was that the automation systems and technology tools would be so intuitive that little judgment would be required for workers to apply policy. What it learned is that every client's situation is different

and eligibility workers have to understand how policy applies differently to different situations. In addition to implementing more slowly, they have learned to carefully delineate tasks that can be assigned to contractors and to specify task requirements and performance standards in contracts.

HHSC staff point out that if a state is going to change policy to conduct telephone rather than in-person interviews, it needs to have the telephone system infrastructure to support the increased volume of calls.

Two innovative practices identified are the use of "change champions" to facilitate the rollout of changes and a partnership with a private grocery chain for outreach.

The use of change champions was initiated in early 2009. Prior to that, changes were disseminated through supervisors in the field. Change champions, designated HHSC staff, help to manage and facilitate the change process. They are part of an effort to present TIERS in a more positive light—in the past, state staff viewed TIERS as a threat to their jobs. Change champions meet together once per quarter to share the latest information and discuss any implementation issues. Their role is to ensure that staff are getting the latest, correct information about changes (for example the change in the name from FSP to SNAP) and to mitigate the rumor mill. They emphasize that TIERS is a tool and explain what TIERS will do for staff and for improving services.

HHSC has partnered with a large grocery chain in Texas for SNAP application assistance and nutrition education. HHSC trained the grocery staff, and representatives from the stores assist applicants with SNAP applications. An outreach worker from a contracted community-based organization comes to the grocery store two days per week, and, at one store in Corpus Christi there are weekly SNAP nutrition education activities, such as cooking demonstrations. The application assistance activities have been expanded beyond the Corpus Christi store to other stores in South Texas.

Future Plans

The goal is continue expanding TIERS so that everyone will be on the same system and use the same processes. Other plans include simplifying the application form, eligibility policy, and eligibility determination processes. Telephone capacity at local eligibility services offices will be increased so that more interviews can be conducted by phone. Vendor contracts are being re-procured and instead of a single contract for document processing, eligibility support, CHIP, and enrollment services, work will be divided among multiple contractors.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
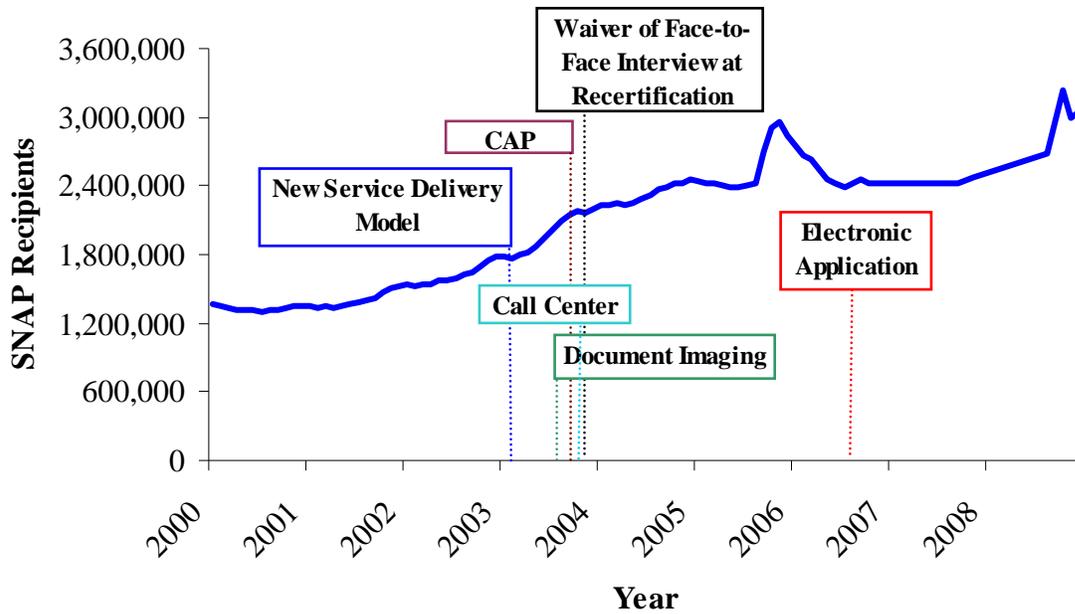
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HSC), Austin, TX (state office)
Southfield Customer Care Center, Austin, TX (call center)
Eberhart Office, Austin, TX (local eligibility services office)
April 2009

UTAH CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

Utah developed a comprehensive, multi-component "Eligibility Modernization" initiative to develop and implement a "new and innovative" eligibility service delivery model for a number of programs and services, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➤ State-Administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload (FY08):**
> ➤ 134,180 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➤ 2008 Unemployment: 3.4%
> ➤ The SNAP caseload increased by 25% in 12 months between (12/07 and 12/08).
> ➤ UI requests are inundating office staff

using new technology to improve business processes and instituting program and policy changes to support the updated model. Through this model, the state created a service system in which a client may receive benefits without ever visiting an office or meeting with a caseworker in person. The state made a series of policy, organizational, and technological changes to create this new delivery system.

Utah received waivers for face-to-face interviews at both application and recertification and to allow clients to call for interviews at their convenience. Five virtual call centers providing eligibility processes, including interviewing, were implemented for each region and data imaging of all documents has been in place statewide since March 2002, resulting in a paperless system. Approximately 225 workers are participating in a telecommuting program statewide, allowing workers in both local and rural areas to perform all job functions from their homes.

Utah's modernization initiative is driven in no small part by the design and development of the state's new rules-based automated eligibility system, the electronic Resource and Eligibility Product (eREP), which will replace the state's legacy system (PACMIS). Although full implementation of all eREP components was scheduled to occur during 2009, several modules were already in operation at the time of our site visit, including online policy manuals (InfoSource) and an online 211 customer resource tool (Utah Cares). In addition, the state has an online application available statewide and an online data-sharing resource tool (eFIND) designed to simplify data matches from multiple sources.

Organizational Structure

For the purposes of administering and delivering services for eligibility programs, Utah is divided into five regions: Northern, Central, Mountainland, Western, and Eastern.[14] Utah's service delivery system is state-administered but regionally-operated. State administrators set policy and standard procedures that apply across the state for all programs, but regional and local office directors are given some autonomy in determining office process pathways, often based on

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[14] The state plans to centralize the service delivery system and eliminate regions in July 2009 (see future plans for more details).

the size and configuration of local office facilities or the demographics of the customer base. State staff meet with the program managers from each region twice a month and create calendars to track implementation of changes and new initiatives. The online policy and procedure update process is characterized as being very structured, with information broken down by function and key process to enable supervisors to extract what is pertinent to their teams. State statute requires that each region has an advisory council comprised of key stakeholders that provide input and feedback from the local perspective.

The agency responsible for determining eligibility and delivering services for the SNAP, the Department of Workforce Services (DWS), was formed in July 1997 by the state legislature as part of a restructuring effort to bring all employment and training programs together into a one-stop service delivery model. Five agencies—the Department of Employment Security (Job Service), the Office of Family Support (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, and SNAP), the Office of Child Care, the Turning Point Program (Displaced Homemakers), and the Office of Job Training—were consolidated to form DWS. This consolidation, which in some ways marks the beginning of Utah's modernization activities, effectively integrated employment programs with supportive service programs and created an employment-centered approach to service delivery. In 2007, DWS also began handling the eligibility determination for medical-only cases (policy is still determined at the Department of Health). DWS now determines eligibility and provides services for the Family Employment Program/FEP (TANF), SNAP, General Assistance, Emergency Assistance, Refugee Assistance, Medicaid, Child Care and the FEP Work programs as well as Unemployment Insurance (UI), WIA and the Employment Exchange at 35 One-Stop Career Centers or Employment Centers (ECs) throughout the state.

Service Delivery Structure

The state continues to use a case management model, with some modifications. In 2006, the state removed eligibility workers from the ECs in the Central Region and placed them in call centers.[15] They now conduct eligibility by telephone and do not work with customers face-to-face. They also moved to a team-model for managing caseloads. A team of workers is responsible for a caseload and any member of the team may work on any of the cases. The state plans to roll this model out statewide after the reorganization as described below. For more details on the call centers and team model, see the modernization efforts section.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

Utah has been one of the national frontrunners in terms of experimentation with eligibility modernization activities, particularly in terms of leveraging new technology to advance its goals. It began piloting some efforts as early as the late 1990s. It has a tradition of evaluating its processes and continually improving them to meet its goals—to increase customer access and services and improve the business process. The state has recently embraced the "Kaizen process"—a Japanese business philosophy advocating the need for continuous improvement. They use this philosophy as they approach all modernization and restructuring decisions.

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[15] A limited number of eligibility workers were added back to the ECs for walk-in traffic.

The state-directed modernization activities—the comprehensive "Eligibility Modernization" project—came about with the convergence of several events and activities that took place in early 2006. State DWS staff were in the process of developing strategic plans for key agency business processes (including the eligibility business process) at the same time that other states such as Florida and Texas were launching major modernization initiatives. Aware that the new Governor, who was focused on identifying efficiencies within state agencies and a supporter of technology, and the state legislature would probably be interested in discussing a similar initiative for Utah, state DWS staff began drafting a business plan that included a comprehensive overhaul of their eligibility model, focusing on improvements to their business process. State staff reported that they hoped to preempt possible consideration by the legislature of privatization of eligibility processes by already having a successful, in-house model in place. Several key team members also participated in a site visit to Florida to learn more about the state's modernization efforts (ACCESS Florida), which would help guide Utah's planning and development process. Deciding that it was time to build on the modernization components already in place in the Central Region, the statewide structured plan for the modernization project was laid out in February 2006.

Another motivating factor for modernization activities was the more than $2 million in sanctions Utah's received in FY 1999 and 2000 due to high SNAP error rates. To deal with these issues, the state used SNAP reinvestment funds to develop a web-based, data-sharing system, eFIND, (described below), launched in January 2004. It enables eligibility workers to search alternate program systems for information used in determining eligibility for many public assistance programs and helped reduce overpayments and increase accuracy.

Key Goals or Outcomes

The state frequently mentioned its desire to increase customer access to services, motivated in part by low participation rates in past years. Overall, however, the key goals of eligibility modernization can be placed into two general categories: (1) increasing customer access and improving customer service; and (2) improving the business process (i.e., creating efficiencies and reducing costs, managing the workload, maintaining program performance and outcomes).

Planning Process/Early Implementation

Utah has been piloting efforts since the late 1990s and new components have been implemented incrementally, starting with pilots that are tested and proven before being expanded statewide. The first eligibility modernization activities were implemented in 1998. Based on the successful experiences of the UI program's shift to a centralized call center model, DWS implemented a similar model for eligibility programs by establishing a call center in the Central Region. Cases from throughout the state were transferred to one location, documents were imaged and, in a major change to the standard customer-worker relationship, cases were processed using a transaction-based model, as opposed to each customer being assigned to a specific worker throughout the process.

This model was abandoned for a number of reasons: (1) document imaging was not available statewide, so most of the work had to be done in Salt Lake City (thus moving jobs out

of rural areas); (2) waivers of face-to-face interviews were not an option; and (3) technology was not yet available to build in worker accountability for completion of tasks under a transaction-based system. DWS reverted to assigning individual caseloads to workers. However, during the next several years, the state continued to focus on advancing modernization activities, including call center technology in the Central Region's Call Center, expansion of document imaging, and modifications of policies (e.g., waivers) required to support modernization.

In 2001, the state conducted analysis of their existing mainframe system, PACMIS, and determined that it was meeting only 52 percent of the state's business needs. The decision was made to move forward with the development of a new rules-based automated eligibility system, with the intent that it be more than just a replacement of the legacy system. The goal for this new system, eREP, was to create a tool that could more holistically meet customer needs by immediately determining eligibility for multiple programs (as opposed to one specific program) while at the same time allow DWS to conduct and manage business more efficiently. State staff felt that the emphasis on identifying new strategies for maximizing the business processes with the new eREP system "really got us down the road with modernization." The first eREP module was completed in October 2003, but work on other components continues and has evolved over time.

Based on this early work, the state developed a comprehensive, multi-component "Eligibility Modernization" initiative to develop and implement a "new and innovative" eligibility service delivery model for a number of programs and services, including SNAP, using new technology to improve business processes and instituting program and policy changes to support the updated model. Although a formal, structured framework and strategic plan for the state's modernization efforts was officially unveiled in early 2006, many of the specific administrative changes and technological enhancements that are viewed as key components of this broad initiative were piloted and subsequently implemented in one or more regions, and, in some cases, statewide, several years prior to that time. Motivated by the dual goals of increasing access for customers and improving workload management and efficiencies, Utah's eligibility modernization process is ongoing and evolving and is characterized by several discrete stages of implementation, defined by competing priorities as well as feedback based on operational experiences in the field. Full implementation of the complete Eligibility Modernization model is expected in fiscal year 2010.

Utah also created a modernization steering team that participated in the design and implementation of efforts. Various workgroups developed for individual activities and included state and local staff. State staff was very interested in feedback from all level throughout the process. DWS also collaborated with a group of about 10 community advocates for many years, keeping them informed and soliciting their advice and input on program and policy changes. Representatives from advocacy organizations also approach state DWS staff with ideas for changes to improve access, such as exempting vehicles as assets for the purposes of SNAP benefits calculation.

Modernization Efforts

During the past 10 years, Utah has implemented a wide range of changes and activities intended to modernize SNAP and other eligibility programs. This section describes policy changes, administrative changes, and new technology components the state has adopted to date to enhance customer access to SNAP and to make program operations more efficient.

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

Based on the experiences with the original modernization model piloted in 1998, state policymakers recognized the need for implementation of a number of policy changes to support the state's vision for modernization. Some of these changes entailed requests for SNAP waivers and others required state policy changes.

➢ **Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview at Initial Certification.** From October 2006 through September 2008, Utah implemented a waiver that allowed the state to substitute a telephone interview for a face-to-face interview at the time of application, without documenting hardship. This waiver, however, was limited to no more than 50 percent of the state caseload. Because the state wanted to apply the waiver where it would have the greatest impact, it was implemented in two urban areas, Salt Lake City (Central Region) and Clearfield (North Region), where public transportation was available. At the same time, Utah broadened its hardship policy to include transportation difficulties (as well as other hardship conditions, such as presence of children under age 12 in the household) as justification for waiving the face-to-face interview across the state—enabling staff to cover rural areas and eliminate face-to-face interviews for a majority of their customers. In fact, state staff reported that about 95 percent of applicants in the areas not covered by the waiver were able to waive the face-to-face interview for documented hardship reasons. In October 2008, a waiver of face-to-face interviews at application for the entire state was approved.

➢ **Waiver of the Face-to-Face Interview at Recertification.** Utah has had a statewide wavier to remove the requirement for a face-to-face interview without documenting hardship at the time of recertification since April 2003. State staff reported that they view this change as "the normal way we do business now."

➢ **Revolving Door Waiver**. The state implemented the "revolving door" wavier in June 2002, which allows workers to reestablish a customer's eligibility within 30 days of the case closure date without completion of a new application. Previously, cases that were closed when required information or verification was not provided within a certain time period were forced to repeat the entire application process. This waiver allows the state to reopen the case the same day the required paperwork is submitted.

➢ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.** Utah was one of the last states to adopt simplified reporting, making that modification in August 2006. State staff reported that they decided

to delay implementation of this change, waiting to learn from the experiences of other states that had worked through the "bugs" associated with it. Switching from change reporting to semiannual reporting required a modification in the state statute. Although staff felt that implementation of the modification went smoothly, they did not feel it had as great an impact as some other changes.

➢ **Expanded Vehicle Exemption.** Utah also exempts all vehicles as an asset through a state option.

From January 2007 through January 2009, Utah also had a waiver that eliminated the requirement that customers be assigned a specific time and date for an interview following submission of an application, if the interview is not conducted that same day. The waiver applied only to customers served by the Call Center operating in the Central Region and allowed customers to call for an interview at their convenience anytime within seven days of application. When a customer telephoned a Call Center, they were placed in a queue (as opposed to voicemail) and the interview was conducted that day. Staff in the Central Region reported that although most applicants called for the interview themselves, workers would typically call customers who did not call the morning after they filed an application. In 2007, the state submitted amendments to expand the waiver to include customers at a call center in the North Region and those who applied online. In February 2009, they received an extension of the waiver to apply it statewide to all customers.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

Utah also implemented a number of changes to their administrative processes and procedures designed to enhance access and improve customer service. In particular, they have changed the overall way customers access through the combination of policy, organizational, and technological changes. As noted above, customers no longer have to visit an office to apply for or continue to receive benefits.

Move from Caseworker to Team Model

In the Central Region, customers no longer have individual caseworkers assigned to them; they have a team of workers that provide assistance. Each team (about 10 to 12 workers) manages a caseload (about 2,200 to 2,6000 cases) and any member of the team can provide information to a customer. The team member splits time between working in the call center and processing cases. Cases are assigned to each worker on the team, but whoever answers the phone when a customer calls will take action on the case. At review, the case goes back to the assigned worker and they are responsible to follow up on the recertification. (For more information about the call centers, see below.) After the redesign (see future plans), the team model will be implemented statewide.

Telecommuting

In an effort to "work smarter with the staff they had," Utah turned to telecommuting for better workload management. Dwindling caseloads in rural areas have lead to situations where

staff may not have an adequate caseload for a full day's work. The Central Region, with larger caseloads, faces frequent turnover among staff who often leave for better jobs in the strong economy in the Salt Lake City area. Telecommuting allows the state to shift work from the busy Central Region to experienced, but underutilized workers in rural areas where a state job is very desirable. Beginning with a pilot program of 10 workers in fall 2004, the Central Region currently has about 155, with 200 to 225 statewide (about 50 percent of the front-line staff). There is a waiting list for these jobs, which tend to go to the most experienced and productive staff. They are expected to have 10 percent higher productivity from home and staff are monitored through programs that track keystrokes and screens viewed.

Moved Eligibility for Medical Assistance Case to DWS

Utah moved responsibility for determining the eligibility of the 60,000 medical-only cases from the Department of Health to DWS in 2007. Previously, medical-only assistance cases and all other cases were managed by two different workers. The consolidation was a cost-saving measure—eliminating duplication of effort in creating two cases for the same clients—that also made the process easier for clients who would now only work with one division instead of two. The 253 medical caseworkers were dispersed into the various EC offices around the regions and (except for nursing care caseworkers) all became general eligibility workers. All eligibility staff (including SNAP workers) received training to understand program rules for the new programs they began working as generalists.

Four-Day Workweek

As a cost saving measure, the Utah Governor mandated that the entire state move to a four-day workweek in August 2008. Staff work from 7 am to 6 pm Monday through Thursday. All state offices (except highway patrol and child welfare services) are closed on Fridays. This extends business hours for working families and clients with alternative work schedules, which has been well received; however, for those clients needing help on a Friday, the three-day wait has been an issue. There were also some initial staff issues at first—e.g., reorganizing childcare and school schedules—however, recent staff surveys show that the new schedule has been embraced internally and that staff think it works. There were also some concerns about a drop in SNAP timeliness but they are changing the effective date stamp to Monday for any application that arrives on Friday (now that Friday is not a business day).

Technological Innovations

Technology plays a central role in Utah's eligibility modernization efforts. The state's umbrella technology project, eREP, is a tri-agency undertaking (DWS, Department of Human Services (DHS), and Department of Health (DOH)) comprised of five modules that are being systematically and incrementally piloted and rolled out over a six-year period between 2003 and 2009. The modules include: Utah Cares, an online resource and referral guide; InfoSource, an online consolidated policy manual for all DWS programs; an online application; a customer directory that links customer information across various systems; and a new, rules-based eligibility determination and benefits calculation system to replace the existing system, PACMIS. eREP products and programs will interact seamlessly and build on existing technology such as call centers, telecommuting capabilities (above), and document imaging.

Call Centers

In mid 2008, the state created five "virtual" call centers (one per region)[16], which answer questions about cases, conduct certification and recertification interviews, accept changes, and in some sites, process applications. There is a statewide 800 number that customers dial, and based on their zip code, they are routes to the appropriate regional center.

Unless the customer requests a face-to-face interview, all initial interviews and recertifications are conducted through the call centers. After applying, the customer calls the call center and they are put into a queue until a worker is available to conduct the interview—the average wait is about 6 minutes. In the Central Region call center (referred to as the CRESC) the worker will conduct the interview and process as much of the case at that time as possible, before passing it to the assigned worker. In the other call centers, the worker passes the case to the assigned caseworker after the initial interview is complete.

Utah Cares

In October 2003, the state rolled out Utah Cares, an online screening tool (http://www.utahcares.utah.gov) and human services directory of government programs, social service providers, and community-based organizations. The state has a partnership with United Way to provide up-to-date lists of community providers and programs and their contact information. Service providers that are not included in the directory can add their information online, which is then screened and approved by the web site's gatekeeper for accuracy before being published on the site. Users can complete a referral through the Utah Cares web site by entering their contact information, which is sent directly to the service provider. Utah Cares does not determine eligibility. Service providers are responsible for determining availability of and eligibility for services or benefits.

InfoSource

Utah introduced its online policy manual in April 2004 after a yearlong effort to consolidate DWS policy. Four hardcopy paper manuals were condensed into two online manuals: one for eligibility for financial, childcare, and SNAP programs, and one for employment-related programs. (Similar efforts were simultaneously undertaken in the Department of Health to consolidate four manuals into one for all medical programs.) The consolidation process afforded the state the opportunity to clean up outdated policy and ensure consistency across programs in preparation for the forthcoming rules-based eligibility system. The manuals are searchable and include links to related policy and procedures as well as automated updates and alerts. Eventually, all rules in eREP will link directly to the relevant policy in InfoSource, enabling workers to better comprehend the determination.

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[16] The state only has two physical call centers but they virtually serve the five regions—customers are routed to a worker delivering service to their region, but the worker may not physically be in region or could be telecommuting (see above).

Online Application

DWS's online application (https://Utahhelps.utah.gov) is a combined application for SNAP, financial programs, and childcare[17]. In 2002, Utah's IT department began to develop a screening tool, which has since been put on hold because customers found it too confusing.[18] However, the state was able to build upon screens developed for the prescreener when creating the online application. In February 2007, the state began piloting the online application to local offices and targeted community partners. It was implemented statewide by October 2008.

The online application is available at local offices and through any Internet connection. When customers come into the office, they have the option to apply electronically or with paper, although workers recommend that customers use the electronic version. Staff are available to assist with the application, and there is an online chat tool (IMing system) that is staffed during business hours to help customers troubleshoot. The application guides users to pertinent questions and diverts them away from extraneous ones, making the process much quicker. Customers are only required to fill out their name, address, and provide an e-signature to submit the application and have it date stamped (if the rest of the application is left blank, the remaining information is collected during the initial interview). When the customer has finished filling out the application, they submit it and it is send to an Application Queue in eREP. The customer is instructed to call the call center number to compete their interview (see above). When the customer calls for their interview, the worker asks the customer for their confirmation number to retrieve the application. After retrieving the application, the worker "sends it to imaging" electronically for storage in the document imaging system.

About 40 percent of submitted applications statewide are electronic. In some offices as many as 80 percent of the applications are electronic. Submitted applications do not autopopulate the MIS system—workers have to enter the information manually—but there are plans to add this feature in phase two of eREP.

eQuery Customer Case Information Web site

In February 2008, the state launched eQuery (https://jobs.utah.gov/jsp/equery), which is an online system to answer many customer questions that workers received by phone or in the office. After a customer receives a case number, they may create an account using their date of birth and an e-mail address. The account includes a 12-month history of information on program receipt, benefit start and close date, benefit status, reasons for denial, and all received verification materials (anything scanned immediately appears in real time). The site does not include any identification information or fraud investigation, in case the system was breached.

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[17] SCHIP and Medicaid online applications are available through another web site.
[18] The state had planned to revise and launch the tool in FY 2008; however, in February 2009 it was still planning the best approach for the tool. They plan to release a tool in mid-2009.

Document Imaging

Document imaging was piloted in the Central Region in late 2000 and expanded statewide by March 2002. Documents for Central, North, and Mountainland Regions (about 85 percent of the state) are imaged at the Central Imaging Unit (CIU). Documents for all other regions are scanned in the local offices. Documents sent to the CIU are put into a queue and workers on the processing team get an alert notifying them of new documents waiting to be scanned. Documents are generally imaged into the system within 24 hours. The hard copies of documents are retained at the CIU for 60 days prior to being destroyed.

Documents sent by mail or e-mail are routed to the CIU and are scanned into the system. Any faxed documents are electronically sent into the system and do not require scanning. The fax number and mail address are publicized widely and offices provide customers with self-addressed envelopes. Hard copy applications that are dropped off at local offices are scanned onsite to ensure timely processing. The CIU scans about 200,000 documents (not pages) per month.

To improve the accuracy and efficiency of the scanning process and reduce inconsistencies in the way documents are indexed, the state created a bar coding system for documents in December 2007. The bar coding enables scanners to automatically index paperwork according to customer and local office. All "structured documents"—those document that originate from DWS—have barcodes, while "unstructured documents"—those that are not forms, like customer pay stubs or birth certificates—do not have barcodes on the document prior to scanning. The state estimates that about 50 percent of the documents are bar coded, which removes the human error factor in case number and document location and decreases document release time into the document imaging system. For those documents without a barcode, staff must assess what the document is, use a drop-down box to determine where the document should be indexed and who it belongs to. This process takes more time and allows for human error.

eFIND

Utah implemented eFIND, a web-based data-sharing system that compiles customer information from other systems using social security numbers (SSNs) as the identifier, in January 2004 after two years of planning and development. It allows workers to gather and view all necessary customer information in one application rather than toggling between multiple screens and systems, which greatly reduces the time spent searching for and compiling information. Furthermore, because eligibility workers are no longer manually comparing information among different systems, eFIND has the potential to increase accuracy and reduce errors. The application was designed to be user-friendly and performs quickly—the average time for a full search is 15 to 20 seconds. After entering the PACMIS case number, eFIND returns all customers on the case, their SSN, age and relationship to the client. The worker can specify their search criteria (which systems to search in, the date range, etc.) based on the information they need.[19] eFIND includes several security features to minimize vulnerability and misuse of

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[19] Searchable systems and information include: Social Security; State New Hire Registry; State Quarterly Wages; State Unemployment Insurance; Office of Recovery Services (Child support); PARIS (VA, Federal/Military Income

personal information, and a full audit trail enables system administrators to view workers' search histories.

eREP Eligibility Determination Module

Development of a new eligibility system (eREP) began in October 2002 after competitively selecting IBM and Cúram. The system is being developed in program-based modules. The system currently models SNAP, TANF, special payments, family medical, and childcare; payments for aged, blind, and disabled customers and waiver programs are still being developed. The state began piloting eREP in one county in September 2008 and they plan a statewide implementation starting fall 2009 over a five-month period.

Unlike its predecessor, eREP is a rules-based system, which means that policy-based rules are encoded in the program. The system determines which programs an individual is eligible for based on customer input. PACMIS, on the other hand, requires the user to choose the programs for which to determine eligibility. Furthermore, workers no longer have to memorize program codes required by PACMIS; all rules and codes are embedded in eREP. This will eliminate any worker subjectivity involved in the determination process and standardize eligibility decisions. Customers will also be informed as to which services and programs they may be eligible.

In addition to eligibility determination, eREP will also standardize all correspondence to clients, allow for more in-depth case notes, and produce sophisticated, customizable reports. Sidebar navigation allows workers to easily move between screens and functions*.*

Customer Directory

In July 2007, the state introduced the customer directory, which crosses six (will be seven) different state systems and links all customer information using a personal identification number (PID), ensuring that duplicate client records are not created in multiple systems. Only one client record exists and all databases will point to the same record.

Partnering Arrangements

Utah's DWS has informally worked with a number of community partners to support their outreach activities by making sure that the information they provide is accurate. For example, DWS participates in outreach efforts with homeless advocates in the Central Region where there is a large homeless population. In addition, eligibility workers are outstationed at other sites, such as Battered Women's Shelters and Refugee Centers, where potential SNAP customers congregate. In addition, a food bank in the Central Region that helps customers fill out SNAP applications made special arrangements with the local Employment Center so that their

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and Interstate Matches); Alien Registration; State Motor Vehicles; Employment Plan (TANF and Food Stamp participation); Food Stamp Disqualification (DRS); Public Housing (Eight local Housing Authorities); Worker's Compensation; PACMIS; HEAT (Utility Assistance); Driver's License; Prisoner; National Directory of New Hires; Vital Statistics (Birth and Death Records); and The Work Number.

staff may send completed paper applications to a special fax center for registration and processing.

Beginning in October 2007, DWS established the Community Partner Initiative, a formal partnership to increase access to services. They began gradually piloting four sites—mostly food pantries and senior centers—and plan to have 60 sites statewide. Using a $500,000 SNAP participation grant, the state provided partners with computers and printers with fax machines in return the partners help customers apply online and set up and allow access to eQuery accounts. Training on the application and eQuery tool is provided to the partners.

Utahans Against Hunger are administering the grant for DWS. They establish Memoranda of Understanding with the partners and distribute the hardware. DWS chooses partners and evaluates their performance.

Outcomes Tracked

Utah's data management system (currently PACMIS) periodically produces a series of standardized reports, but staff are also able to develop other ad hoc reports (e.g., on customer characteristics) at any time using the data warehouses. Data on accuracy rates, timeliness, and reapplications tracked monthly. The state is also able to track data related to specific program components or activities, often by region. For example, the Central Region has developed a database for the CRESC that tracks information on the interviewing process, including dropped calls, average length of calls and wait time. The Region also maintains a database on the imaging process that tracks length of time for a document to be imaged as well as the number of mistakes made. The state also tracks statewide use of the online tool and applications. The system is capable of tracking practically any needed statistic.

Challenges

State and local staff identified several challenges related to modernization broadly and related to specific initiatives. State administrators noted that modernization could potentially impact the link between employment and supportive services programs. As noted above, the original goal of merging multiple agencies to form DWS was to emphasize the link among employment services and all other supportive services. There is some concern that eligibility modernization activities that eliminate the need to make an in-person visit to an EC could weaken this connection. A Steering Team subcommittee is looking at ways to sustain connection with an employment counselor if the application is submitted remotely. In addition, helping staff adjust to the rapid and often dramatic changes to their job duties that accompany such a comprehensive overhaul of the service delivery model was mentioned as a key challenge. Utah has convened a Change Management group to assist staff in working through and adjusting to changes to their jobs. Strategies are being developed to address and allay fears among staff that their specific skills will not be valued or their jobs may not be secure in the new model.

The state also suggested that balancing the pace of technological development with changes in policy can be difficult. "The policy world is not static; just keeping up is a challenge." Any policy changes have to be coded and merged into the new technological systems that states

are developing. Making decisions to change policy is often a much faster process than implementing those in the new systems and the slow pace can frustrate administrators.

Utah also found that technology can be an efficient tool when it is working, but it can cripple the entire system for months when it does not. In December 2008, a virus corrupted the state's document imaging server, and the entire system went down. The state was still dealing with backlogs and continued glitches in February 2009. It caused timeliness problems for applications and several cases were closed due to missing verification materials—although the customers had submitted them. As one staff member said, "if it doesn't get imaged, it doesn't get verified, and it doesn't exist." The state would like to invest in two servers so there is a back up in the future.

Although technology may produce cost savings and efficiencies overall, there is sometimes a struggle between additional up-front work for overall savings. For example, in the eREP system more information is needed up front and it is more structured—workers have less ability to skip around—which workers feel takes more time to complete cases. However, the state believes that the saving in reducing overpayments and increasing accuracy will outweigh the additional up-front time.

Finally, sometimes policy requirements have challenged the efficiency of the system. The state sees a lot of churning at recertification—in December 2007 the state found that 40 percent of cases were closed at recertification for not completing the process and about 90 percent of those that reapplied were approved. The requirement of a signature at recertification—either mailing in or dropping off at office—seems to be the biggest challenge. Utah plans to talk with FNS about alternatives to a written signature at recertification.

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

Both state and local administrators and staff identified a number of aspects of the eligibility modernization process that they viewed as key successes. Overall, state staff felt that they had benefited greatly from the "great leadership" provided by management in DWS as well as the ongoing support from both the governor and the state legislature. Another key factor noted was the fact that many of the members on the Eligibility Modernization steering team had past experience in eligibility and were, therefore, able to understand and relate to the on-the-ground implications of proposed changes.

They also found particular modernization initiatives to be successful. Staff indicated that Utah's biggest success is that customers now have the ability to receive services without going into an office. "It took a lot of time and effort to get the appropriate waivers, technology, and business practices in place, but it has been very successful." The scheduling waiver is also very popular with the advocacy community and customers. It allows customers to apply on their schedule rather than the states. They have found it helps customers enormously and the rate of denials for not completing an interview has dropped significantly. Finally, workers believe that eFIND "saved our lives. Without eFIND we don't know how we would live." Initially staff was skeptical that one system for all verification would not be accurate, but they quickly bought-in after using it for a few months. It reduced work and increased efficiency.

The state also learned several lessons through the modernization process. First, they felt that their iterative approach to implementation had contributed greatly to the initiative's success. By first launching each new component (e.g., online application) as a pilot, followed by staggered office-by-office implementation, the state was able to identify and correct issues as they arose, prior to a statewide roll out. The iterative implementation strategy also enabled DWS to demonstrate success with one or more modernization activities, helping them gain support and buy-in from both staff and policymakers before moving on to another related effort. Second, staff would suggest to other states that they "don't plow new ground" when beginning to modernize. There are enough different option for modernizing happening across the states, that what someone else has done can go a long way in developing a new system. Finally, state staff believe that document imaging is key to modernizing. It provides "flexibility to port work to the where the workers are. It is what allows you to move work around. You have to do it first." It also makes the other modernization—particularly technology and organizational changes—possible.

Future Plans

Utah is planning several expansions of current initiatives. The state has struggled with creating a useful pre-screening tool that customers could understand. They plan to release a tool in mid 2009 that will determine eligibility for SNAP, TANF, GA, and childcare. They are still determining how complicated to make the tool, but initially it will be built outside of the eREP system and link to the online application web site. Eventually they plan to create a screener within the eREP system that will populate the online application and eREP. The state is also planning to add a payment portal to their online application web site where customers may pay their Medicaid pay downs or General Assistance medical premiums. In response to customer suggestions, they also plan to add information about which materials the customer still needs to submit and give the customer the ability to report changes online through their accounts. The state would also like to expand services of the statewide 800 number by using an IVR system, which will allow customers to get information on how to apply, an option to complete an interview, an option to go to eQuery IVR (the same information available on the eQuery web site), and an option for talking to workers about their case.

The state is also planning several reorganization efforts. In an effort to standardize access to programs and to decrease costs, the state plans to consolidate and centralize the operation of DWS and the Eligibility Centers across the state. They intend to restructure and streamline the DWS, with all work being reported up to one division. They will also eliminate the five regions across the state and standardize the operation of the EC offices. They will create a "flatter" organization with fewer managers, supervisors, and trainers. They plan to keep the call center system and expand the team model across the state. They will likely increase the use of specialization for efficiency, particularly with medical cases. The changes should be fairly seamless for the customers and most workers; although the day-to-day operation will likely change for staff in rural counties. At the time of the visit, the state was still in the planning stages, meeting extensively with workgroups, and many of the details had not been finalized. They plan to implement the restructuring July 2009.

In addition, caseworkers are currently generalists—they deal with all assistance programs. The state plans to move toward specialization of programs, particularly for the medical programs. They believe it would be beneficial to have workers focused on medical eligibility all day long. In the long-term, they have also discussed moving to a transaction-based processing model, first tested in the initial phase of modernization efforts. eREP will provide the technological capability to assign and track completion of work and provide the accountability that was absent when it was initially implemented.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
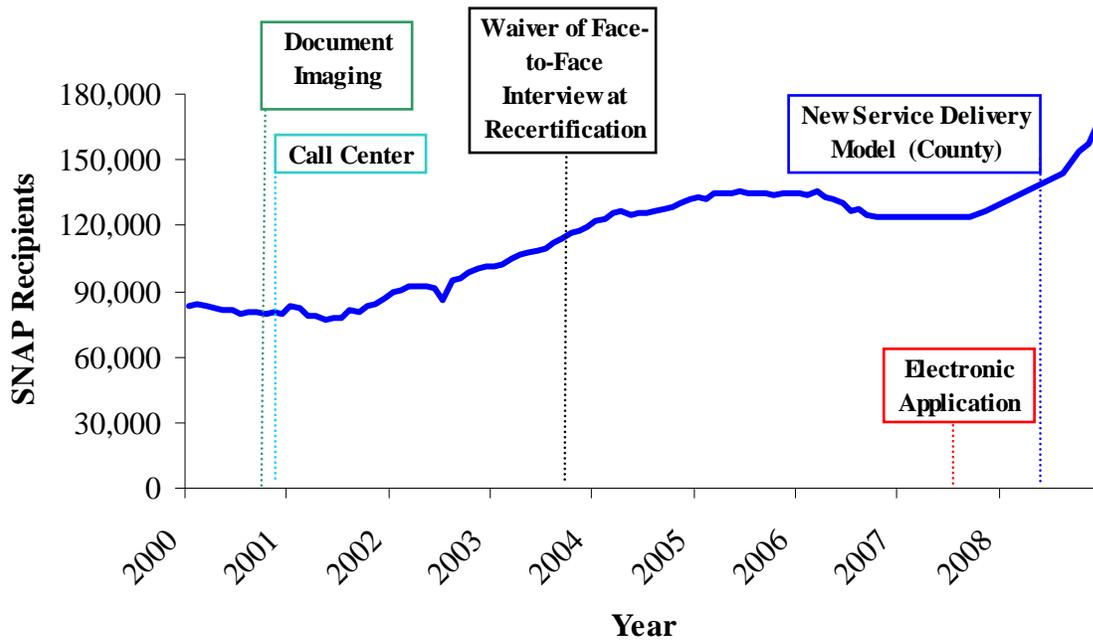
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Department of Workforce Services, Salt Lake City, UT (state office)
West Valley Employment Center, Salt Lake City, UT (local office)
April 2007

Department of Workforce Services, Salt Lake City, UT (state office)
Midvale Employment Center, Midvale, UT (local office)
Roy Employment Center, Roy, UT (local office)
February 2009

WASHINGTON CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

Washington has been a leader in modernization activities, taking an incremental approach since 1998. The state embarked upon its initial modernization efforts to increase its capacity to meet performance goals within existing staffing levels and to improve upon a low participation rate in Basic Food (Washington's SNAP Program). As participation increased, staffing levels decreased due to budget constraints. This motivated the creation of additional redesign initiatives to improve access, provide good customer service, and reduce error rates. Washington sought and obtained waivers to provide transitional benefits, eliminate face-to-face interviews at application and recertification, and develop a combined application project. The state's modernization activities involved a number of technology changes, including a document imaging system and call centers, as well as an online application and automated voice recognition system. The state contracts with community-based organizations to provide Basic Food education, outreach, and application assistance.

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➢ State-Administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload Size (FY08):**
> ➢ 581,001 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➢ 2008 Unemployment: 5.3%
> ➢ Hiring freeze
> ➢ Increased caseload
> ➢ Program expansion
> ➢ Operating under a deficit
> ➢ Received performance bonus money

At the time of this study, Washington was continuing its modernization efforts, simultaneously dealing with staff and resources shortages and significantly increased caseloads. The state set up workgroups to identify areas in need of increased efficiency and access, using extensive data systems and input from clients, front line financial eligibility workers, and top-level administrative staff. The state has garnered national attention for its comprehensive approach to modernization.

Organizational Structure

Basic Food, as Washington's SNAP is called, is operated by the Community Services Division (CSD) in the Economic Services Administration (ESA) of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The Division is organized into 6 regions and 62 local offices within those regions. In addition to Basic Food (SNAP), ESA also administers Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), General Assistance, Refugee Assistance, Medicaid, and the Working Connections Child Care subsidy program. The state headquarters works closely with regional administrators, who run the services in their respective regions within state policy guidelines.

Service Delivery Structure

The service delivery method varies slightly by local office. Some offices use financial eligibility workers with an ongoing caseload and a set role, while others rotate eligibility workers between interviews, call center functions, and Document Management System (DMS) processing.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

As noted above, the state was motivated to begin modernization efforts as a strategy to increase participation and address system-wide pressure due to reduced budgets and staff shortages. To maintain or improve service, the state had to rethink their traditional service delivery methods. Staff looked at changes as a matter of necessity. New funding sources have also been made available through the governor and private foundations, making possible system upgrades and other customer access measures.

Key Goals or Outcomes

Washington's key goals for modernization include increased participation; increased access points for customers; improved work environment; consistent service delivery statewide; efficient work processes; increased staff time available for customers needing more intensive services; maximized use of technology; and fostering an environment for improvement.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

As part of their plan to establish a culture of continuous improvement, Washington state started the Service Delivery Redesign Project in August 2008. The project is designed to identify 1) areas of the benefit process that are in need of modernization and 2) initiatives that will fill those needs. The project includes a steering committee and six different review teams, each with responsibility for a portion of the benefit process: intake and interviews; verification and eligibility; maintenance (recertifications and changes); case management and social services; the call center initiatives; and access.

Using Ken Miller's *The Change Agent's Guide to Radical Improvement* as a basis, groups are mapping out each step of the benefits process, and identifying areas for improvement. In addition, groups seek customer input through focus groups and surveys, take feedback from other staff via a project improvement web site called the "Idea Log," and use program data to pinpoint procedures that are most inefficient. Once the implementation teams (made up of representatives from local and regional staff) identify efficiencies and suggested changes, they are presented to the steering committee (the ESA director, regional administrative staff, and the office chief) that reviews the proposal. Approved initiatives are then piloted, and eventually, if successful, implemented statewide.

Modernization Efforts

Policy Changes

FNS State Options and Waivers

➢ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.** Washington implemented simplified reporting in October 2004. State respondents indicated that there were some challenges to implementing this policy option because of the integrated nature of the state's assistance

programs. It took the state longer to implement this option because they had to clarify how each program would handle the new reporting procedure. State staff report that this policy has been very beneficial in terms of accuracy and participation. Certification is usually 12 months with an interim report (which can be completed by phone) about midway through that period. Elderly and disabled households can be certified for 12 months with no interim report, and other households, such as the homeless, are certified for six months with no interim report. Reporting times across benefits programs are synchronized as much as possible.

> **Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility.** Washington initially implemented Categorical Eligibility to households meeting the gross income test for Food Stamps because it eliminated resource eligibility and verification requirements for all but a few income-eligible households. Very few people were over the eligibility level for resources, but quite a few were denied or terminated because of failure to provide verification. Washington incorporated categorical eligibility through their online information and referral web site "Your Community Services Office." In late 2008, Washington expanded to Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility policy, raising non-cash TANF/Maintenance of Effort-funded eligibility to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

> **Combined Application Project (CAP).** The Washington Consolidated Application Program (WASHCAP) Central Unit was initiated in September 2001 and the first WASHCAP benefits were issued in December 2001. The project is now in its second five-year phase. The program serves more than 46,000 people and is operated using a single statewide call center. DSHS partners with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to identify potential clients and offer the program to them. When a person applies for SSI, the Social Security Administration documents potential WASHCAP eligibility in their system. If the SSI benefits are approved, the information is electronically transferred to DSHS and a WASHCAP case is opened in the DSHS system. Using SSA data, WASHCAP provides simplified access to food benefits. The application is reduced to a one-page form. The state had an aggressive outreach campaign to eligible households at the beginning of the project.

> **Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview at Recertification.** Washington has a waiver of face-to-face interview at recertification (from 2001). As of 2009, Washington was in the process of applying for a waiver of face-to-face interviews at application.

In 2007, DSHS teamed up with the Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI) to give all students on Basic Food free school meals. A file of names is submitted by DSHS to OSPI and students in Basic Food households are automatically deemed eligible for free meals. The policy reduces the amount of income verification needed for WIC and school meals.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

Office Reorganization

Prior to 2007, Basic Food was operated by the Division of Employment and Assistance Programs (DEAP) in the Economic Services Administration (ESA) of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). In 2007, DEAP, the policy arm of the Department, and the Community Services Division, merged under a single director in ESA, while maintaining section chiefs. The change was meant to provide easier coordination between policy and implementation. Staff noted that the change did not affect the culture of the Basic Food program or how they interacted with clients.

Local offices in White Center, West Seattle, and Burien also consolidated as part of the Making Connections effort, a multi-site national demonstration funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation aimed at improving outcomes for low-income children and families. Two offices were closed and relocated in White Center. Staff noted that the centralization helped meet problems of staff shortages and facilitated connecting clients to multiple programs.

Redesigned Application

The state has recently redesigned the application for benefits to further reduce barriers. This was described as an ongoing effort.

Language Lines

If multilingual staff are not available, case workers can use a "Language Line" service that the state contracts through AT&T. If someone who needs an interpreter calls, staff obtain the client's number and call back with an interpreter on the line, or, if a client comes into the office, an interpreter is put on speaker phone.

Outstationed Workers

The local office in Belltown, a Seattle neighborhood, outstations staff in the community to target certain populations. Native American outreach workers take laptops with broadband access to the State's Virtual Processing Network (VPN) to local community centers and parks. This enables outreach workers to conduct full interviews offsite.

Blue Slip

The community service offices use Blue Slip, a reception processing system. Blue Slip shows reception workers which staff are present. A receptionist can also see the name of clients with appointments who checked in at the computer kiosk in the reception area. Receptionists notify staff that the client has arrived through a chat feature designed for interoffice communication.

Technological Innovations

Call Centers

In August 2000, the state decided that call centers would serve the following functions: (1) information and referral so that people did not have to come into the office to be referred, (2) childcare subsidy program administration, (3) stand-alone medical assistance administration (Medicaid without other programs attached to it, many serving elderly and disabled people), and (4) the change process for all cash programs and the Food Stamp Program. Functions that remained in the office included the initial application process and review process for cash and food assistance programs and the traditional social services—dealing with issues that required social work intervention (domestic violence, assistance with SSI application process, and other more intensive services).

All regions were charged with developing call centers, but the design was not specified. Some regions developed large, centralized call centers, while other regions chose to put a group of call agents in each Community Service Office. Several regions chose to specialize their call centers by program. This process provided the state with an opportunity to test a variety of call center models. Call centers across the state use a variety of technologies designed to facilitate the process, including the Call Management System, which keeps detailed records of all call center activity. Call centers also use headsets, DeskView (an oversight program that allows supervisors to see how many calls are waiting, the average speed of answers, and the staff available), interactive voice software, and "Answer Phone" technology, which allows clients to check their account and document status through an 24-hour automated system.

In 2008, a state Call Center Team made up of state and local office representatives published a report on needed changes to Washington's call center model. Moving from 40 different call centers with varying scope of service and different organizational structures, Washington now plans a more consolidated approach, establishing one statewide call center connected virtually and accessed through one statewide toll-free number. Local office staff reported concern about how the consolidated call center would affect their business processes. State officials pointed to the efficiency of routing calls to whoever was available statewide, including multi-lingual staff. In general, calls will be routed to the closest available local office representative based on the client's zip code and language needs. Staff will stay in their current worksite, but will be connected to the larger, statewide system virtually. Washington hopes to train all call center workers to be "eligibility experts" for multiple programs, so that calls are resolved at first contact and not passed off to another worker.

Taxi Phones

One local office visited (Belltown) had set up phones in the waiting area that are connected directly to the call center. Clients can pick up the phone and talk to someone to find out the status of a document, application, etc. if they don't want to wait in line. These phones were implemented to provide regular access to a phone for those clients without one, and to reduce clients' waiting time in the intake area.

Electronic Applications

Washington developed an online application initially in 2001 as a regional project. The online application code was completely rewritten for its statewide release in order to build a platform for future enhancements. The online applications comprised an estimated 33 percent of applications received in January 2009, an increase of 12 percent from January 2007. The majority of applications were faxed, mailed, or delivered by hand. At the time of this study, the online application went directly into the document management system, but the worker still had to input the information into the client database. Washington was undergoing plans to revamp the online application to make it user-friendly, with the first phase of upgrades occurring in early 2009. Beginning in April and May 2009, staff reportedly was implementing changes that allow online applications to feed directly into the client database. Staff, however, will still review applications manually once the initial date is transferred. The online tool includes a benefit estimator—by answering some basic questions online, clients can find out their estimated monthly benefit.

Document Management System (DMS)

Document management started in Region 6 (a regional office in the Olympia area). Once the system was proven to be reliable and easier for clients and staff, the program went statewide in 2001. The document management system supports both offices and call centers by enabling workers to not use paper case files.

The DMS system was developed entirely in-house. The goal of the project was to eliminate paper records, reducing the time spent maintaining and retrieving paper files, and thereby transitioning the workforce from clerical staff to more skilled eligibility workers. The development process took about nine months. Seven hub imaging units that image and index documents were strategically located close to U.S. mail hubs increasing the speed in which documents enter the system. The state transitioned offices one at a time into the DMS.

The DMS system was initially modeled after Washington's paper case system. It operates much the same way, where documents come in and are reviewed by staff in charge of taking necessary case action. They are then filed away in that system and marked as completed. Documents can be mailed or faxed to the imaging hub or to the local office. They may also be dropped off at a local office or hand-delivered during an interview. The scanning machines are programmed to distinguish between forms and identify households using barcodes.

The DMS system images well over ten million documents a year. Staff noted that turn around time for documents to be scanned into the system is about a day. When the DMS was first developed, its sole purpose was to track documents, but management tools were added to allow a supervisor to shift work electronically, moving cases from one office to another, from one call center to another, etc. Workers receive assignments and documents electronically and work from an electronic to-do list, which they can sort in a variety of different ways. The state is continually working on enhancements that link the DMS and legacy systems in order to bring all of the work into the electronic case record.

Data-sharing

Verification of client information in Washington is completed almost entirely online. Staff have online access, through their data system, to client information in the state penal system, child care, Child support, social security benefits, vital statistics (through the Department of Health, can pull birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates, etc.), employment data, veterans benefits, unemployment, and benefit receipt in other states (through the Public Assistance Reporting Information System (PARIS)).

Other Technological Innovations

Barcode System: Barcode, an in-house application, and its Inclusive Case Management System (ICMS), shows all the information that has been scanned into the system for a given client. Caseworkers, using dual monitors, keep Barcode open on their screen during interviews. To facilitate access to other systems, Barcode gives links to the various Management Information System interfaces—including ACES, the state's legacy system—and organizes all client documentation.

ACES Online: Through ACES Online, workers have access to a number of different databases and can generate letters and notifications for clients remotely. ACES Online includes a "Spider" tool which scans existing benefit data bases and alerts line workers if there are changes in a client's case in other systems, such as Social Security, TANF, Employment and Security, Veterans Administration, the Department of Motor Vehicles, UI, etc.

Automated Trainings: Washington has an extensive training system designed to provide targeted, efficient training, while also giving staff a means of promotion, through completing extra courses online. State staff explained the system as one of "blended learning", mixing instructor led trainings, on the job trainings, and automated, online trainings. As part of the online training, Washington runs the online Learning Management System (LMS), which keeps track of each staff member's training history. Using the LMS, staff can see who has signed up, who has started, and who has finished any given training. These trainings can be streamed over the Internet and allow for staff to take them when it is convenient. As part of the LMS, Washington implemented "just in time training" processes, where training is given to staff just before the roll out of a new initiative.

Double Monitors: Financial workers and almost all other staff in Washington use double monitors to increase the speed of the application process. By having two monitors, financial eligibility workers can have both Barcode and ACES up at the same time, without having to switch back and forth between programs.

Screen Pop: DSHS planned to implement Screen Pop in October 2009. An efficiency measure, screen pop automatically pulls up a client's case for staff at call centers. When the client calls in, they are asked to enter their client ID or SSN before being forwarded to the call center worker. The computer then automatically pulls up the file as the call center worker answers the phone, thus eliminating any time spent looking for a client in the system. Staff

estimated about half of the people calling in are known to the system, potentially saving a significant amount of time.

Virtual Processing Network (VPN): Outstationed staff can access all the databases and electronic systems of the Basic Food network, including scanned documents in the Barcode system, using VPN, or the Virtual Processing Network. VPN allows staff to conduct full interviews and process applications offsite. At the Court Resource Center, one staff member uses VPN to conduct interviews and process applications for clients coming through the corrections system.

Partnering Arrangements

The Washington Basic Food outreach program uses community-based contractors and subcontractors to inform low-income households about Basic Food Eligibility requirements, application procedures, benefits of the program, and to connect these people with the Basic Food Program. The state has nine primary contractors with a total of 67 regional and local contractors in addition to two statewide contractors, and one Tribal contractor. These contracts are managed at the state level. Every three to five years, the state issues a Request for Qualifications to identify nonprofit community based organizations that are interested in participating in the outreach contracts. There is a variety of different contactors—food banks, public health, tribal, ethnic groups, etc. One contractor operates a statewide toll-free information line. The state encourages its primary contactors to subcontract with organizations that can best serve the local populations. In 2008 the contractors submitted just over 10,000 applications, or about 2.6 percent of the total applications processed.

Applications have barcodes placed on them by the contractor or subcontractor so the state and the primary contractors can track the results of their efforts. The state has made their contacts performance-based related to the impact of the outreach activities. These new "Pay-Per Performance" contracts reimburse contractors for every successful application submitted with their help. The state is paying close attention to targets and approval rate of applications that come from contactors and reasons for non-approval. The goal of that effort is to increase the number of approved applications from the outreach activities.

In addition, local offices develop separate partnerships within their immediate communities. In Belltown, the local office partners with the Court Resource Center at the County Court, where people reentering the community from the Department of Corrections, jail, Community Court, Mental health Court, Drug Court, and meetings with probation officers can go to sign up for DSHS benefits. One DSHS worker stationed at the Center has access to the DSHS network through the Virtual Processing Network, and can complete full interviews and initiate benefits.

Outcomes Tracked

Washington state agency respondents indicate that their work is very much data-driven. Their integrated database allows them to extract and analyze data in many different ways. The Governor has implemented GMAP (Government Management Accountability and Performance), which has helped agency staff in developing standards to measure success. Program directors in

ESA have to report monthly to the assistant secretary of DSHS about performance in all of their programs. There are standard reports as well as the capability to create customized reports. For example, local administrators monitor the time it takes to process documents, the number of telephone calls answered by each worker, call waiting times, and the volume of paperwork processed.

For the call centers, the state tracks the volume of incoming mail, the type of mail, processing speed, etc. The state also has participation data by county, by month; the number of households below poverty, and the percentage of those below poverty that were participating in Basic Food. For customer satisfaction, a comprehensive client survey is conducted biannually by the DSHS Research Department, as well as Region and County level surveys conducted by local offices.

Challenges

State officials noted some challenges that are common to all of their modernization efforts, including, making changes within integrated systems, budget neutrality requirements, and staffing.

Bringing other programs along is a challenge as the state works on the modernization of the Basic Food Program. Programs are "siloed" at the national level, so changes that are required for one program are not coordinated with other programs. Also, state and federal policies do not always match up.

Budget neutrality was also a challenge for the state agency. State officials report that although Washington is a fairly "progressive" state, it does require a balanced budget and sometimes programs or services have had to be cut back due to budget constraints.

Staffing was described as a major challenge. The Basic Food and medical assistance population is growing and staffing has decreased by 35 percent. Part of modernization has to do with finding new and efficient ways to do the work, which is an ongoing challenge. Washington is a strong union state and state staff indicated that union rules and responses are an important factor in planning and implementing changes.

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

In 2006, Washington received a performance bonus of $4.88 million and another performance bonus in 2007, for $2.4 million. State respondents note that many things contributed to the improved performance, but that modernization—including simplified reporting, call centers, and DMS—was a significant factor. State respondents report that simplified reporting has had the most dramatic effect on the program. It has increased participation, accuracy, and efficiency.

State officials indicate that DMS paid for itself in less than a year, a conclusion based on costing the effort associated with maintaining paper case records and comparing that to both the initial hardware and software costs and the ongoing costs of maintaining the DMS system. In 2002, CSD estimated the annual savings to be $5.5 million a year, based on the pilot project.

State officials and local office staff also identified multiple successful time saving and efficiency measures beyond DMS, including double monitors, Screen Pop, online applications, electronic check-in, the Learning Management System, and automated response at call centers. Call centers were also seen as a successful means of opening up access to clients. State staff noted how important the call centers and the ability to move work electronically were when dealing with people displaced from flooding in 2007. Success was also noted in terms of cost, with significant savings coming from the move to "pay-per-performance" contracts with community partners, as mentioned above.

Washington respondents said they learned from other states to take time to prepare for any major change, whether related to policy or operations, and to try to include their partners in these preparations. State officials have found regular communication between policy and quality assurance staff to be very effective in training staff appropriately and in implementing changes smoothly. State staff indicated that another lesson learned is to stagger the dates of change and to make sure staff are available to manage the higher volume when a change is implemented that may increase participation. The need for consistent project management over the course of implementation was another lesson learned.

Future Plans

The state plans to continue with its Service Delivery Redesign project, including a statewide call center. At the time of this study, the call center initiative was tentatively set to be implemented in late March 2010. As part of the new Call Center initiative, there will be one state-wide toll-free number that is routed to six, regional, virtually connected call centers. Clients will first select a language, and then give their zip code/SSN/ID so that they may be routed to the closest available call center representative that fits a client's language needs. As part of the initiative, clients will be given the option of staying on the line to take a customer service survey, or the system will call them back at a later to administer a survey. In addition, detailed call data will be kept on the Call Management System (CMS).

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
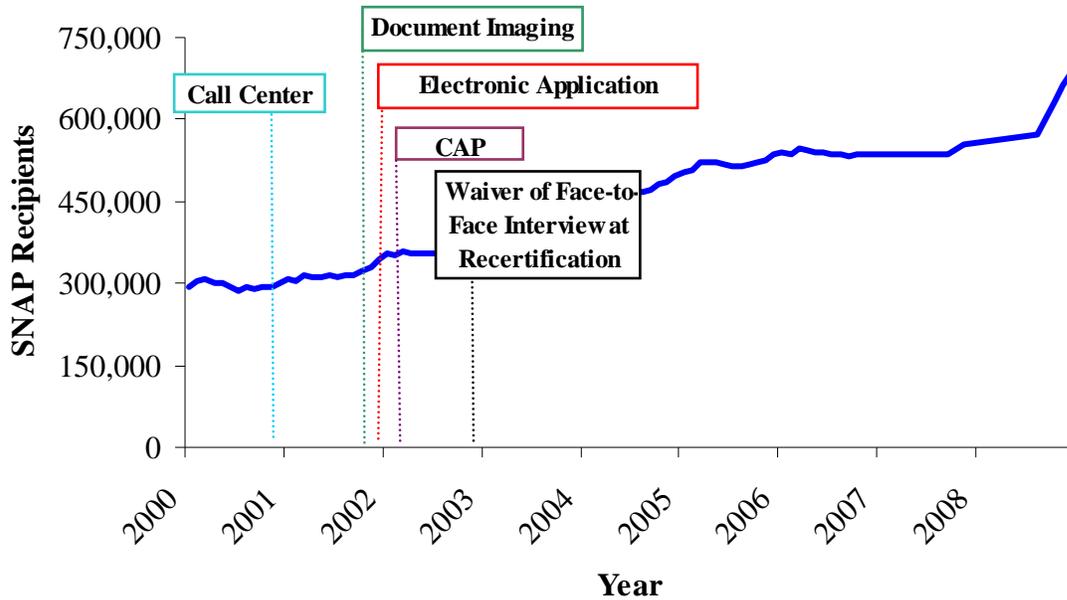
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Community Services Division, Olympia, WA (state office)
DSHS Renton CSO, Renton, WA (local office)
April 2007

Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Community Services Division, Olympia, WA (state office)
DSHS Belltown Community Service Office (CSO) Belltown, WA (local office)
DSHS White Center CSO, White Center, WA (local office)
February 2009

WISCONSIN CASE STUDY SUMMARY PROFILE

Broad Overview of Key Modernization Efforts Implemented

During the last five years, Wisconsin's modernization efforts have occurred on several fronts, particularly in the area of technology. With the support of an FNS SNAP Participation grant and state funding, the Division of Health Care Access and Accountability (the lead administrative agency for the SNAP) developed a web site called ACCESS to Eligibility Support Services for Health and Nutrition. ACCESS provides several customer-friendly online tools: an eligibility prescreening self-assessment, an online application tool, a web portal that allows recipients to check the status of their benefits, and an online change reporting tool. Another technology-based modernization initiative, now implemented on a statewide basis, is document imaging of client files. Some counties have also implemented call centers or change centers. Wisconsin has also made policy and administrative changes that simplify the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application and certification process, including simplified reporting, development of simplified notice language and, in some local areas, have reorganized the intake process or workflow.

> **QUICK FACTS:**
>
> **State vs. County Administered:**
> ➢ County-Administered
>
> **Average Monthly Caseload Size (FY08):**
> ➢ 422,781 people
>
> **Economic or Contextual Factors:**
> ➢ 2008 Unemployment: 4.7%
> ➢ Increased caseload (grew 25% in 2008)
> ➢ Many families who didn't see themselves accessing these programs are now applying.

The primary goals of the state's SNAP modernization efforts are to increase SNAP participation, reduce local agency staff workload through increased program efficiency, and increase payment accuracy. Closely intertwined with these goals is program simplification through closer alignment of SNAP and Medicaid/CHIP (and other programs when possible) policy and program administration.[20]

Organizational Structure

Wisconsin operates a state-supervised, county-administered SNAP program. Along with Medicaid, SNAP is administered through 72 counties and seven tribes (in about 100-plus local offices) by the Division of Health Care Access and Accountability (DHCAA). DHCAA provides SNAP policy direction and guidance to local agencies for programs. A statewide automated eligibility system called the Client Assistance for Re-employment and Economic Support System (CARES) is used by DHCAA and Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to determine eligibility, calculate benefits, manage ongoing benefits, and maintain data for multiple programs, including SNAP, BadgerCare (i.e., Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP), W-2 (Wisconsin's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF program), and Child Care. Most of the information technology changes that drive SNAP modernization efforts in Wisconsin are spearheaded by the state.

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[20] In Wisconsin, SNAP is called FoodShare.

The state provides funds to county and tribal agencies to administer assistance programs, but counties also contribute their own funding. The local share is approximately $20 million, with a federal match of the same amount (about $40 million to $50 million, all funds, annually). Each agency is expected to uniformly apply program policies set by the state. Each agency has a contract with the state that outlines requirements, including performance standards for payment accuracy. Agencies have discretion over how to administer the program, including office organization and staffing structure, and client flow. However, they have little flexibility in interpreting or creating policy.

In July 2002, the SNAP moved from DWD to the Division of Health Care Financing (DHCF), which administers the Medicaid/SCHIP programs. This organizational change positioned the state to more effectively focus resources to meet program goals. Then in December of 2007 there was another large reorganization to better align enrollment of BadgerCare and FoodShare and promote the integration of policy in the enrollment area. The programs were reorganized based on function, not program, and the program functions were divided into separate bureaus for enrollment, policy, and program integrity. The program is now part of the Division of Health Care Access and Accountability.

Service Delivery Structure

The service delivery structure varies by county in Wisconsin. Dane County uses a case management system, in which staff carries a caseload. In Milwaukee County, the staff do not have a caseload and work specific tasks, depending on the unit they are assigned. However, the state plans to move back to a case-based model when they take control of Milwaukee's program in 2010. For more detail, see the organizational changes section below.

Key Motivations/Impetus for Modernization

In Wisconsin, several developments converged around 2002 that both motivated and shaped the goals, nature, and features of Wisconsin's modernization efforts. The state felt the most important development was organizational in nature. The SNAP, which moved in the late 1990s to the newly formed DWD as part of several organizational changes to replace welfare with the work-based W-2 program, was moved back to DHFS/DHCF. The shift allowed DHFS to coordinate SNAP improvement efforts with the state Medicaid program and focus on increasing participation in their programs while educating families about health and nutrition through outreach.

The organizational change also gave rise to addressing the SNAP and Medicaid programs holistically and to developing strategies that aligned and leveraged the benefits of both programs. The three primary goals that have driven policy and program decisions are to (1) increase participation and access, including providing good customer service; (2) increase payment accuracy; and (3) decrease workload and increase efficiency. State respondents noted that they explicitly try to evaluate and balance these three goals in the course of developing and implementing any new SNAP initiative. Of these three goals, increasing payment accuracy in response to high error rates was the initial trigger for reform and was made a priority by the Governor and administration, including department and division leadership. (As of 2002,

Wisconsin's SNAP had been in sanction status for 10 years, an ongoing situation that the Governor and others deemed unacceptable.) Tightening state resources provided further motivation to reduce sanctions by reducing the state's SNAP error rate.

When SNAP moved to DHFS and into the same division as Medicaid/SCHIP in 2002, the SNAP agency director and staff identified new and different opportunities about the role and direction of the SNAP going forward. The viewpoint was clearly articulated during state-level interviews and echoed by community partner staff. State staff said that merging SNAP and Medicaid under the same division had "made all the difference" and was a "watershed" in terms of readjusting priorities. The shift was summed up as changing the focus from families working to get SNAP to families needing SNAP for their health. The state began a campaign that promoted the idea that "Food Stamps Make Wisconsin Healthy." In 2003, the state received a large FNS-funded SNAP Participation grant to develop web-based online eligibility tools available to the public at large as a way to increase participation. In October 2004, the state changed the name of their state SNAP to FoodShare Wisconsin to reduce stigma and promote the benefits of improving nutrition.

The 2002 Farm Bill was enacted the same year that SNAP was moved to DHFS. Staff noted that this was fortuitous timing because the flexibility afforded by the Farm Bill's policy options facilitated the Department's ability to align Medicaid/SCHIP and SNAP as much as possible and promote FoodShare participation. State staff noted policy changes are considered in the context of both programs and this has enabled them to better align policies to the benefit of both programs. The state staff also reported that they believe their integrated policy approach to FoodShare and Medicaid/SCHIP saved substantial resources by allowing staff to give a lot more attention to both programs and spend less money to improve both at the same time.

Key Goals or Outcomes

Wisconsin has three primary goals for all policy and program changes—increase participation and access, including customer service; increase payment accuracy; and reduce workload for local agencies. In addition, decreasing workload burden through increased program efficiency remains a high priority and catalyst for modernization efforts in Wisconsin. The challenge facing state and local administrators and staff is not just to increase participation or to decrease error rates through improved payment accuracy, but to accomplish these goals in the face of budget deficits that have created dwindling resources and staffing constraints.

Planning Process/Early Implementation

The state approached modernization from a holistic approach and developed strategies to align and leverage benefits from both the medical programs and FoodShare, with an eye to their three primary goals. The state recognized the importance of collaboration when developing policy and technology. They involved input of varying levels from DHFS policy staff, IT staff, local agencies, and community partners.

In terms of overall strategy, the state developed a five-year information technology (IT) strategic plan to outline both short- and long-run technical issues and solutions. As with most

technology, the potential for a tool or software to become obsolete is high. As Wisconsin plans for future initiatives, they attempt to develop systems that will not "age out," working on upgrading the current systems rather than replacing them with new ones. They are currently in the process of slowly changing their current mainframe eligibility system to a web-based interface. They refer to this process as incremental renewal—updating the system in increments that are each fully-funded and independent of each other. Their new technology is built with an eye to the future and longevity of the tools.

Modernization Efforts

Since 2003, Wisconsin has implemented a wide range of SNAP modernization initiatives. The initiatives include several types of policy changes, administrative changes, and new uses of technology. During the development and implementation of these initiatives, Wisconsin staff worked closely with community partners. For example, they helped arrange customer focus groups and provided feedback on the automated application tools. The following sections describe Wisconsin's SNAP modernization efforts in detail.

Policy Changes

Wisconsin has made several changes to SNAP policies over the course of the last six years and has attempted to align as many SNAP policies and other program policies as possible.

FNS State Options and Waivers

➢ **Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility.** In July 2003, the state adopted the expanded categorical eligibility option, which included eliminating the asset tests for SNAP recipients.

➢ **Simplified Reporting Requirements.** In June 2004, the state implemented the simplified reporting requirements, allowing recipients to report changes in household circumstances in a six-month reporting form.

➢ **Waiver of Face-to-Face Interview at Initial Certification and Recertification.** In 2006, the state also applied for and received waivers for the face-to-face interview at both certification and recertification. State staff noted that some counties are more receptive to making clients aware of the hardship exemption for the face-to-face interview than others. One advantage of the ACCESS benefit application tool (discussed below) is that it specifically asks applicants applying online if they have a hardship (and provides all the reasons that qualify for a hardship exemption) and would like to waive the face-to-face interview. Waiving the face-to-face interview is viewed as a means to reduce workload and increase customer service.

➢ **Revolving Door Waiver.** In 2006, Wisconsin implemented a 30- to 60-day application break (i.e., applicants will have up to 60 days to return their verification materials and complete their application before the case closes, instead of the current 30 days).

> ➢ **Transitional Benefits.** The state extended transitional benefits to TANF cases for five months after a case closure.

In 2003, the state created a simplified self-employment policy, which uses prospective budgeting. Wisconsin also received a waiver to implement a Combined Application Project (CAP). SNAP staff plans to work with the Social Security Administration to automatically enroll Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients in SNAP. Due to competing priorities, the state has yet to implement the CAP program. However, staff are considering implementing the program in 2009.

Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Functions

Several changes that affect the administration of SNAP were described during the site visit, some of which originated at the state level and others that occurred at the local level. These changes include front office redesign, an automated "Outlook" scheduling system, redesigned notices, and worker specialization. Further detail on each change is provided below.

Waiting Room and Up-front Processing Changes

Dane County reorganized the waiting room and up-front process in their office to maximize workflow, decrease workloads, provide better customer service, and make efficient use of the new technology. The reorganization included redesigning the waiting room layout, reappointing waiting room staff, and adding check-in kiosks, computers, and phones. These changes took place in June 2008.

Prior to the redesign, the office had one customer service line at a desk in the middle of the room. This often caused long lines to form and crowding around the desk, which delayed check in and appointments. To alleviate this, the county redesigned the desk arrangement in the lobby and added kiosks. They moved the service desks against the back wall and added a "check-in" kiosk at the door. The kiosk is the first thing clients see when they enter the lobby. It is a touch screen that allows clients to enter their name, date of birth, or case number to indicate they have arrived for their appointment. The kiosk indicates if the client is too early of too late for their appointment and must reschedule. If the client is on time, an e-mail alerts the worker that his or her scheduled client has arrived, and sends a receipt to the client saying "you're checked in" and "you will be seen in 15 minutes" or "go up to front desk." The kiosk is available in three languages—Spanish, English and Hmong—and a staff member rotates around the lobby to guide a customer to the kiosk and help if needed.

The county has also changed the staff available at the front. They have three staff available at all times—a greeter who circulates throughout the lobby and helps or directs clients, a clerical person who accepts applications and answers general questions, and (newly added) an economic support specialist who answers specific technical questions about cases.

Finally, several new computers were added to the lobby for using the online application (see below). They also added new phone lines to the change center (see below) and have a copy

machine for verification materials. New furniture was also added to the lobby, because there are now fewer lines and clients wait in chairs for appointments.

Local-level Centralized Microsoft Outlook Scheduling by Clerical Staff

The Dane County Human Services agency introduced an initiative that required clerical staff to schedule all client appointments for the caseworkers. This change was made in response to applicants having a variety of alternative methods to apply for benefits (i.e., online, telephone, mail), and the need for a centralized point of intake that could accommodate all of the entry methods. At the same time, Dane county felt that the state's CARES scheduling system was no longer sufficient to manage the new scheduling process, so they developed a centralized Microsoft Outlook Scheduling program. Under this new program, a clerical staff person schedules interviews for applicants and recipients after cases are assigned to a caseworker. The interview times are entered into the caseworker's Outlook calendar. The action will alert the caseworker of the appointment. The caseworker can see who is scheduled, what kind of appointment it is, and details about the client. At the end of each day, the system automatically sends letters to all clients with their scheduled interview times. The county tested the scheduler in early 2006 and rolled it out in mid-2007.

Caseworker Email Accounts

In Dane County, caseworker e-mail addresses are provided to clients in an effort to make it easier for clients to contact workers and to reduce traffic into the offices. Both phone numbers and e-mail addresses are provided to clients through a "How to contact your worker" document. Clients have been receptive to the e-mail addresses and many workers find it easier to respond quickly to e-mails while they are multi-tasking than to respond to phone calls.

Statewide Notice Redesign

The state redesigned all of their FoodShare decision notices. These include closures, awards, and changes in benefit amount. The state considers this an extension of efforts begun under the ACCESS project to simplify information conveyed to clients. They had received complaints that notices sent to clients were too long, not readable, and confusing. The state decided to conduct focus groups with clients to get feedback on how to improve the forms. They determined that they needed more pictures and bullets, and should highlight the important information. The new notice forms were designed to have the same look and feel as the ACCESS web site (see below). Like the web site, the forms are now targeted at a fourth-grade reading level and much more user-friendly. Notices were distributed beginning January 1, 2008.

Worker Specialization

Milwaukee County moved from caseloads to workloads by creating seven different specialty areas for staff. The specialty areas included an intake unit, a call center, a six-month reporting unit, a verification unit, and a review and recertification unit. The transition began in 2006 and was complete by June 2007. However, due to issues with timeliness and non-

responsiveness from the county call center (see below), the state will be taking control of the county offices and moving back to a caseload-based system.

State Control of Milwaukee County Offices

Milwaukee County had numerous problems with poor customer service and application timeliness that resulted in a class action lawsuit, naming both the county and the state. To resolve the case, the state agreed to step in and take over the human services office in Milwaukee County. In May 2009, the state began processing all application from ACCESS. In July 2009, they planned to take over the call center with a new number and new workers and on January 1, 2010 they will take over the entire process. Caseworkers will keep their jobs, but be required to remain in their positions, and all supervisory staff will have to apply for a limited number of positions.

The state has involved a community advisory group to help provide input on the transition. It includes 45 representatives from the community, including advocates for FoodShare, HIV, the Hispanic community, the Hmong community, and the elderly community. They will continue to meet regularly even after the transition is complete to discuss any issues that arise.

State Managing Childless Adult Caseload for Entire State

Beginning in June 2009, the state will extend healthcare benefits, through BadgerCare Plus, to childless adults who are not elderly or disabled. All cases will be administered by the state—counties will no longer serve this population. Any additional services these clients require, including FoodShare, will be administered by the state. The state believes they can more efficiently administer the programs to this population from one centralized office and at the same time reduce some of the financial and workload burden on counties as their caseloads continue to rise.

Technological Innovations

Wisconsin, a state that has been in the forefront in its development of integrated automated systems for human services programs, has invested substantially in technology to achieve their goals. Since 2002, Wisconsin has undertaken large-scale technological initiatives to modernize the SNAP (as well as other programs) through the development of ACCESS, a web-based eligibility tool system, and development of CARES Worker Web (CWW), a web-based interface for eligibility workers that upgrades Wisconsin's statewide eligibility system for workers. The state also transferred all of their paper files to electronic documents and created electronic case files. The state also encourages county offices to develop call or change centers and explore uses of technology.

Eligibility Tools: ACCESS

Using a FNS program participation grant and state funds, Wisconsin invested around $6 million to develop a set of tools, known collectively as ACCESS. ACCESS is a publicly

available, web-based tool that allows clients to prescreen, complete and submit applications, get up-to-date information about the status of their benefits, and report job changes online. In addition to these tools, ACCESS includes a "Common Questions" feature that provides general information in a question and answer format about many different benefit programs, including FoodShare. All of the ACCESS tools are very user friendly and available in English and Spanish—a client may toggle between Spanish and English at any time. Text is written at a fourth-grade reading level, and, depending on given tool, has a variety of helpful features such as a progress bar, help buttons, and intelligent driver flow designed with questions based on previous answers. Clients are required to create a personal account before applying for benefits.

The ACCESS system is viewed as an innovative way to help the state meet several goals. The primary goal for developing ACCESS was to increase participation in FoodShare, Medicaid, and other program by raising awareness about potential eligibility, reducing stigma associated with applying for and receiving assistance, and making it easier for clients to apply for and maintain benefits. The state also wanted to improve customer service by providing alternative methods to apply and receive benefit information, reducing office visits and calls. In addition, the state wanted to reduce local agency staff workload by reducing the amount of time workers have to spend on answering routine questions and data entry.

Eligibility Screening Tool

The Am I Eligible (AIE) self-assessment tool was implemented in August 2004. It allows individuals to quickly—within 15 minutes—determine if they are eligible for a host of social service programs.[21] A list of programs the client is potentially eligible for appears on the screen at the end of the prescreening and then information is provided about how to apply. For the FoodShare program, the screening results provide a dollar range for the SNAP benefit for which they might be eligible, both providing individuals a concrete sense of the value of the potential benefit and helping to dispel the notion that the likely benefit is too small to be worth pursuing. The client may apply directly through ACCESS for programs of interest, although any information entered into the prescreener does not autopopulate the application.

Application Tool

The Apply for Benefits (AFB) application tool, implemented in June 2006, enables individuals to apply for FoodShare, Medicaid, and the family planning waiver programs through ACCESS.[22] The application takes 30 to 60 minutes on average and the tool encourages individuals to complete the full application. In compliance with the law, a user may, however,

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[21] AIE provides a common screening for the following: FoodShare, Family Medicaid, BadgerCare, and Family Planning Waiver; Elderly, Blind and Disabled Medicaid, Premium Assistance, and Long Term Care; Senior Care, Medicare Part D, Women, Infants and Children (WIC); The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), School Meals and Summer Food; Tax Credits (EITC, Homestead and Child Credit), and Home Energy Assistance.

[22] The Family Planning Waiver Program is a Medicaid program that allows women ages 15 through 44 to get certain family planning services.

skip all of the questions and simply submit a FoodShare application with their name, date of birth, and address (there is a "I am homeless" box for those without an address). The ACCESS application captures most of the information needed in the CARES system to complete an application (about 80 to 90 percent if totally completed by the client). Some detailed information on non-citizens, and the elderly, blind, and disabled is not asked.

Applicants may apply for FoodShare and Medicaid at the same time, using only one application. If a person first indicates that he or she is only interested in applying for Medicaid, the AFB will encourage them to select FoodShare as well. These features help maximize the potential for AFB to increase program participation. Applicants are also asked if they prefer to talk with a worker in person or by phone for their interview. The application includes an e-signature and will be immediately processed. The application interfaces directly with CARES and is listed in the local agency's "Inbox" where it assigned for processing. The information provided by the applicant in the application is pre-populated in the CARES system. About 35 to 45 percent of applications in the state are submitted through ACCESS.

Personalized Benefit Information Tool

Since September 2005, The ACCESS web site also includes Check My Benefits (CMB), which allows recipients of FoodShare, Medicaid, SeniorCare, and SSI Caretaker Supplement to check the status of their benefits, the amount and date of distribution of benefits, and the date of their next review. It will also let the user know what documents they need to provide and by when the documentation needs to be provided (e.g., proof of earnings) and the reason why a benefit is denied. Each Check My Benefits user sets up a personalized "account" with a secure user ID and password. The data in CMB are furnished from the CARES system and updated nightly.

Change Reporting

Wisconsin added to its ACCESS menu is Report My Changes (RMC) in September 2006. RMC allows clients to report job changes (i.e., new jobs, change in wage or hours, and loss of job). The state is working on adding other change types such as address, other income, household composition and expenses. Change reports are sent to CARES and then assigned to the appropriate office for automated review and processing.

CARES Worker Web

The state is developing a tool called the CARES Worker Web (CWW), which serves as the access point for the web-based eligibility system caseworkers use to determine client eligibility and access case files. As such, it provides a connection to the ACCESS system—Wisconsin's primary modernization initiative. The CARES eligibility mainframe, implemented in the 1990s, is being phased out and the state is moving to a web-based system, housed within the CWW[23]. More than 90 percent of the work for an interview has been converted to this web-

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[23] CWW is also an electronic one-stop for all policy changes, training materials, manuals, listservs, and process handbooks. Any information a caseworker may need to complete their job is included on the site. Staff also have electronic "inboxes," in which they receive advisories, tips, recently asked questions, applications, and reminder e-

based system; however, the mainframe is still in place for some tasks (e.g., confirming the benefit, notices of decisions, setting the benefit level). Eventually, CARES will be completely phases out. The state is completing the conversion in phases.

State staff believe that CWW represents a better alternative to updating and improving the automated eligibility system than developing an entirely new system. CARES has been fully operational since 1994 and represents a significant financial and human capital investment. The system has undergone continual change since its inception, and CWW represents the next phase in Wisconsin's incremental approach (i.e., updating and enhancing the existing system rather than developing an entirely new system) to automated system improvements. Although the look and feel of the CWW screens is better than the CARES mainframe, a few caseworkers mentioned that they found making some types of changes in the new interface more difficult and time consuming than in the old mainframe. There were also mixed reactions among the caseworkers about the usefulness of some of the documentation and inboxes.

Statewide Electronic Case File System (Document Imaging)

Beginning in 2004, the state began planning for the implementation of a document imaging project called the Electronic Case File (ECF). Almost $2 million of SNAP reinvestment funding was used to provide the infrastructure support necessary to implement the initiative. The goal of ECF was to reduce worker and client burden as well improve program efficiency. The state estimated a yearly savings of nearly $875,000, by reducing an estimated five minutes of staff time per case per year through reliance on an electronic case file system.

Beginning in fall of 2004, Dane was the largest of three counties that piloted this initiative. Roll out for statewide implementation began in 2005 and it took a little more than a year for the conversion to take place. The state provided county agencies with high-end scanners to scan all documents. Workers scan all new files and old files of reapplicants; old files of non-recipients are not scanned. The document imaging initiative is not just for the FoodShare case files, but for all of the assistance programs using the CARES system. Therefore, a new FoodShare client who has been receiving TANF benefits will already have documentation in the system that will attach to the new file. The client will not need to resubmit information already obtained for another program. In addition, because all agencies have access to the electronic case files, if the client moves from one county to another or from one household to another, the file will follow the person.

In Dane County, caseworkers were responsible for preparing the files for scanning, which included adding a coding system to the top of each document needing to be scanned. The state provided parameters and guidance on what needed to be scanned but gave local agency offices flexibility in determining exactly how much to scan. The state tracks the number of documents and associated cases scanned by each county on a monthly basis and backs up all files on the state server.

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mails on their cases. Staff can also receive "distance learning packages"—i.e., online training—through the site. The state occasionally pushes these packages out to all staff and they are required to complete the online training at their convenience.

Once the documents were scanned, the electronic files were linked to the appropriate case file in the CARES eligibility system. As workers review a client's case, they can pull up any scanned files through links. It took staff time to get used to the new electronic files, but the local staff believe that the initiative has the potential for significant time savings. It was also noted that the document imaging of case files facilitated quality control efforts because supervisors no longer have to retrieve case files from workers. Instead, they can electronically retrieve cases for monthly targeted quality control supervisory reviews.

Local Change Reporting Processing Center (Call Center)

While the state is generally supportive of call centers and change reporting centers, the decision to implement them rests with individual counties. Several county human service agencies have developed change centers, including Dane County and Milwaukee County. The Dane County change center opened in 2003 with 4.5 staff and in 2009 had 10 full-time, dedicated staff. The impetus for creating a change report center was in response to the need to reduce the error rate and more efficiently handle the challenge of an increasing workload (due to increased caseloads) with no increase in staff resources. Error rate reinvestment funding was used to support the initial development and implementation of the Dane County center.

The Dane County change center fulfills three functions. It serves as the central "connections" call line—answering general questions, explaining how the application process works, and the like. Second it is the central intake point for all reported changes for all programs administered by the office (i.e., FoodShare, medical assistance, child care assistance, W-2). Finally, the center is responsible for processing all changes that are reported by any method other than in-person interviews—phone, fax, e-mail, ACCESS online change reporting system, and mail—and for sending the appropriate verification forms to clients and processing the information returned by clients. There are plans to expand the responsibilities of Dane County change center staff to include processing all verifications, (i.e., paper copy verifications dropped off by clients in addition to those reported by phone or online). All changes handled by the change reporting staff are noted in the CARES system for the caseworker. The change center staff do not take applications over the phone, but will help link the applicant with the appropriate caseworker. Local agency change center staff do not see clients or carry caseloads; instead, they focus exclusively on handling inquiries and processing reports in changes in circumstances. No new staff positions were created to administer the change center; these new responsibilities were filled by shifting existing staff responsibilities within the office.

The change center does not have voicemail and people must be put on hold if all call center staff are busy helping other clients; in the event that the automated queue is filled to capacity, clients calling in will encounter a busy signal. The office was planning on upgrading their phone system, a change that would allow them to better manage the processing of incoming calls.

Milwaukee County also implemented a call center in 2007, however, their center was full service. A client could call a report a change, obtain case information, ask what verification materials they need, and full process the case, including certification interviews. The call center

was also the only avenue to contacting a caseworker. The call center had 20 staff allocated to answering calls. However, the center was rarely fully staffed, with only 4 to 12 people answering phones on any given day. The staff had significant problems meeting the demand—average wait times were an hour and only about 5 percent of all calls were answered. The state will assume the Milwaukee call center in July 2009. It plans to change the telephone number and fully staff the center. It will continue to provide the same services, but have yet to decide if it will distribute caseworker contract information after the last phase of the take over in 2010.

Data-sharing

The state conducts data matches with the Department of Transportation (Department of Motor Vehicles), the Internal Revenue Service, state wage data, the child support division, and PARIS.

Partnering Arrangements

The SNAP in Wisconsin does not currently have formal partnerships with any community-based organizations (CBOs) or faith-based organizations (FBOs) that involve CBOs handling different aspects of the certification and recertification process. DHS has an outreach coordinator to increase the focus on outreach for the state. The outreach coordinator works with community partners to get support and feedback on new initiatives and policies, conducts research to identify areas with low participation, and actively engages those communities in increasing their participation rate. In addition, DHS has regular face-to-face meetings with advocates who serve on the Income Maintenance Advisory Committee (IMAC) Program Coordination Subcommittee as well as several other more informal partnerships.

Wisconsin did establish formal partnerships with several CBOs (including food pantries, tribal health clinics, WIC sites and Community Action Agencies) during the development and implementation of the ACCESS tools. The state provided computers and training to the service providers at the demonstration sites. Some providers were also provided funding for staff time. In addition, the demonstration project contracted with two community-based organizations—the Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP) and the Milwaukee Hunger Task Force—to serve as formal project advisers. These organizations were involved in reviewing and providing feedback to the design of ACCESS in the early stages, identifying and overseeing several demonstration sites, and promoting the use of the ACCESS tools.

The state is still interested in having CBOs inform their clients about SNAP and help facilitate access through assisting them with ACCESS. Although state funding to support this kind of partner involvement was discontinued after the SNAP Participation grant ended, Wisconsin continues to work with partner agencies to increase access points around the state.

Outcomes Tracked

Wisconsin's data system has several "canned" reports that they produce periodically, but they can also query the database to produce additional reports as needed. The database contains information on cases and program integrity. For example, the state has conducted some analysis

of whether the method by which the application is filed (e.g., in person or online) and the type of interview (either in person or phone) impacted the error rate and found no evidence that it had.

The state is tracking some descriptive data related to the ACCESS web site. The "Usage and Eligibility Results Report" provides Access Report Summary data on AIE, CMB, AFB, and RMC. The state has also tracked those outcomes that are easily identifiable when a policy change is implemented. For example, they know that the approval rate for ACCESS applications is 55 percent, as compared to 85 percent in traditional cases.

The state has also developed an agency scorecard for each county, which includes data such as application timeliness and SNAP error rates. Some counties use this monitor performance after implementing new efforts and for lobbying for funding. In the past, the state also assessed customer service for each county and created a report.

Challenges

Wisconsin staff identified a few challenges to modernization. First, although the state emphasized the importance of training, it was difficult to conduct because there were 79 different agencies. Staff didn't like to travel to training site and take time off from casework, but most don't like distant learning (training conducted through computer programs). It was a constant balance to find the correct training methods for the counties. In addition, conveying information to counties does not necessarily mean it is implemented—"communication and implementation are two different things." As the state modernizes, shifting the culture at some of the local offices takes a bit longer, particularly with waiving fact-to-face interviews or encouraging use of online applications.

Staff also mentioned challenges with document imaging. The state focused more on the back end scanning versus front end. It is now thinking about scanning documents first and then linking them to the case. It didn't originally have that connection set up and "the technology had to catch up to us."

Staff at one of the local offices also felt that the biggest challenges to modernization were still having a degree of face-to-face traffic in the office everyday and cut backs in staff to conduct the work—often requiring staff to work overtime just to keep pace with the work.

Successes/Lessons Learned/Promising Practices

The state felt that its biggest success was implementing the electronic case file. Electronic case files blur county agency lines especially when there is a disaster since work can be conducted anywhere. It provides much more flexibility to states. The state also believes that ACCESS has changed the way staff think about everything. Initially, the staff did not treat ACCESS as a major innovation; however, it has evolved into a critical tool in serving clients. All of the programs want to be part of ACCESS. For instance the department dealing with disability wants to add a question on disability—with the online tool clients could access an HMO in one day versus two months. The site also educates; it puts the best choice in front of applicants.

Staff suggested that communication, planning, and staging are paramount for a successful initiative. They emphasized that the earlier in the process this can begin, the better. Because Wisconsin has a county-administered system, state officials felt that engaging the counties and getting buy-in during the early stages of projects was vital. They found it important to go into the community and to the counties to communicate the purpose and goals of each project, but they did not oversell the initiatives. When these groups were "on board," the state found that the groups helped champion the initiatives to others. It was also important to the state to receive feedback from counties, CBOs, advocates, and clients, and incorporate the comments into plans.

During the planning stages, the state identified where the biggest challenges would be and focused on developing solutions for those. For example, Milwaukee has the largest caseload in the state and administers the program in a very different way from most other counties. This causes problems for developing new policies that will work universally in the state. Generally, if the initiative works for the most challenging groups, it would work across the state.

With respect to the development and implementation of the web-based automated eligibility tools, the state identified several lessons. Including input from customers (or the "end users") prior to designing each component of the site is an important factor to success. The state found that conducting focus groups with clients was extremely helpful and provided a different perspective on what was needed than might be conveyed by advocates or other service providers on their behalf. The state also suggested that training is critical for a new initiative. It indicated that it would be costly for years if everyone does not properly understand the functions and purpose of the initiative.

The state also recognized that even with extensive planning up front, there are generally unanticipated problems that appear after widespread use. Therefore, it is important to build in time and resources to make post-implementation modifications and refinements to the ACCESS tool. If the project does not have enough resources to respond to problems early on, the project could be plagued with ongoing implementation issues for years. One should set aside six to nine months to fix any problems with new implementation before moving on to the next phase. Staff did not always do this and found themselves going back and losing resources.

One county staff person also mentioned that in general, "…one of the lessons learned is you have to embrace technology. You can slice and dice it. Think outside the box and technology allows you to do many different things.…We're foolish if we don't jump on opportunity to make it easier for workers to manage. So many things can be automated."

In addition, although many problems arose in Milwaukee County after modernization, staff felt that specialization can work. However, in Milwaukee workers did not have a voice. Specialization was imposed and not modified when problems arose or staff had concerns. "They never bought into it and were not explained to why this was easier for them. It's a lesson learned. We're going to ask our workers what they think. Their ideas will let us know what issues are occurring and what needs to be addressed."

Future Plans

Wisconsin has several additional modernization efforts planned for the future. The state has been approved for a combined application program (CAP) project to automatically enroll Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients in SNAP. It plans to implement the program in the next year. It are also in the process of developing a telephonic signature, in which staff will read the rights to a client over the phone and when the client agrees a .wav file will record their "signature." This will work for all telephone interviews and recertifications. The state plans to develop this centrally starting in July 2009 and then distribute the technology to counties.

The state has also conducted some meetings to discuss online recertification. The client would log into their online account in ACCESS and conduct their review (answer questions). They would have to send in any required verification documents. State staff also wants to explore data matching. Staff spend 30 to 40 percent of their time on verification, so data matching could reduce the amount of verification and maintain or improve accuracy. They are considering conducting a third-party match, perhaps with the Social Security Administration, that would be timely and automatically updatable. They are considering using some of the stimulus money to consider their options.

Implementation Date of Key Modernization Efforts by Monthly Caseload
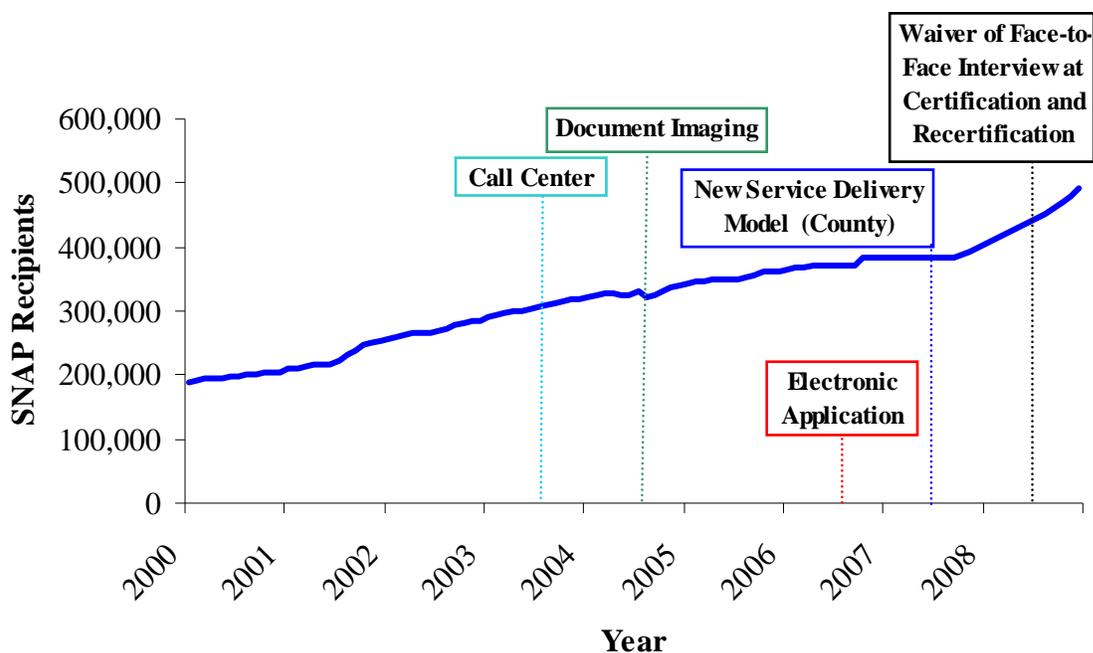
Source: Caseload data from Food and Nutrition Service; modernization initiatives collected from case study visits.

Locations Visited and Date of Visit

Department of Human Services, Madison, WI (state office)
Dane County Department of Human Services, Madison, WI (local office)
April 2007

Department of Human Services, Madison, WI (state office)
Dane County Department of Human Services, Madison, WI (local office)
Milwaukee County Department of Human Services, Madison, WI (local office)
May 2009

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS' AND ELIGIBLE NONPARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES WITH SNAP MODERNIZATION EFFORTS

This section provides a summary of the focus groups held in each of the 14 case study states. The synopsis includes an overview of focus group procedures and respondent demographics. It also summarizes focus group respondents' opinions about and reactions to states' SNAP modernization efforts including policy changes, organizational changes, technological changes, and partnering arrangements.

Focus Group Procedures and Respondent Demographics

Each site visit included two focus groups, one with SNAP participants and another with individuals who were potentially eligible for SNAP benefits, but were not currently enrolled. A total of 273 individuals participated in the focus groups, with 127 in the participant focus groups, and 146 in the eligible nonparticipant focus groups. Two focus groups were held in all 14 states, with the exception of Washington state, which had zero attendees in its nonparticipant focus group.

Basic demographic information was collected from focus group respondents. Sixty-one percent of all focus group respondents were female and 38 percent were male, similar to the national SNAP participation rates by gender (59 percent female and 41 percent male).[24] Focus group respondents ranged in age from less than 20 to more than 56 years old. The largest percentage of focus group respondents (slightly over 34 percent) were between 41 and 55 years old. A higher percentage of the focus group respondents were older adults (slightly more than 22 percent of focus group respondents are older than 56) than the national SNAP participation rates for older adults (roughly 9 percent of SNAP program participants are older than 60). The racial and ethnic background of the focus group respondents roughly mirrored national SNAP averages. Forty one percent of focus group respondents were Caucasian/white, 38 percent were African-American/black and 12 percent were Hispanic/Latino. The majority of focus group respondents reported English as their first language, although slightly more than 8 percent reported Spanish as their first language.

Focus group respondents also answered several questions about their family structure, educational and employment status, and history with the SNAP program. The highest percentage (37 percent) of focus group respondents were never married; roughly 24 percent were married or living with a partner, and 38 percent were either divorced, separated or widowed. Slightly under 61 percent of focus group respondents reported no children in their household, one and two children in the household accounted for roughly 13 percent each, and almost two percent of focus group respondents reported six children in the household. The largest percentage (more than 46 percent) of the focus group respondents reported high school or a GED as the highest level of education completed; 27 percent had completed community college or a technical or

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[24] United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2008. Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2007. Nutrition Assistance Program Report Series. USDA, Food and Nutrition Service. Washington, DC. http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/published/SNAP/FILES/Participation/2007Characteristics.pdf.

vocational school and slightly more than 5 percent had not completed education beyond grammar/elementary school. The majority (close to 81 percent) of focus group respondents were unemployed at the time. Not surprisingly given that focus groups were held for both current SNAP program participants and eligible nonparticipants, about half of the focus group respondents reported currently receiving SNAP benefits. Table 2 details the respondent characteristics by participant and nonparticipant focus groups.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics, by Participant and Nonparticipant Focus Groups

Respondent Characteristic	Participants		Nonparticipants	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Total	127	100	146	100
Sex				
Female	83	65.354	83	56.849
Male	43	33.858	60	41.096
Missing	1	0.787	3	2.055
Age				
21-30 years	31	24.409	19	13.014
31-40 years	28	22.047	26	17.808
41-55 years	47	37.008	46	31.507
56+ years	12	9.449	49	33.562
less than 20 years	8	6.299	4	2.74
Missing	1	0.787	2	1.37
Ethnic Background				
African-American/black	49	38.583	56	38.356
American Indian	4	3.15	5	3.425
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0	3	2.055
Caucasian/white	59	46.457	53	36.301
Hispanic/Latino	13	10.236	21	14.384
Other	1	0.787	2	1.37
Other (French)	0	0	1	0.685
Other (Italian)	0	0	1	0.685
Other (Moorish-American)	1	0.787	0	0
Missing	0	0	4	2.74
First Language Spoken in Home				
English	108	85.039	99	67.808
Spanish	4	3.15	19	13.014
Bulgarian	0	0	1	0.685
Gujarati	0	0	2	1.37
Russian	1	0.787	0	0
Missing	14	11.024	25	17.123
Second Language Spoken in Home				
English	2	1.575	14	9.589
Spanish	9	7.087	2	1.37
ASL	0	0	1	0.685
African	0	0	1	0.685
German	1	0.787	0	0
Missing	115	90.551	128	87.671
Marital Status				
Divorced	32	25.197	33	22.603
Married/Or Living with Partner	24	18.898	42	28.767
Never Married	55	43.307	45	30.822
Separated	13	10.236	13	8.904
Widowed	3	2.362	10	6.849

Respondent Characteristic	Participants		Nonparticipants	
	Count	**Percent**	**Count**	**Percent**
Missing	0	0	3	2.055
Number of Children in Home				
Zero	71	55.906	95	65.068
One	19	14.961	18	12.329
Two	23	18.11	13	8.904
Three	8	6.299	11	7.534
Four	3	2.362	5	3.425
Five	1	0.787	2	1.37
Six	2	1.575	2	1.37
Highest Level of Education Completed				
Grammar/Elementary School	4	3.15	10	6.849
Junior High/Middle School	14	11.024	15	10.274
High School or GED	58	45.669	68	46.575
Community College	23	18.11	21	14.384
Tech/Vocational School	16	12.598	14	9.589
University (4 year)	6	4.724	11	7.534
Graduate School	5	3.937	4	2.74
Missing	1	0.787	3	2.055
Current Employment Status				
Not employed	96	75.591	125	85.616
Working less than 20 hours per week	15	11.811	10	6.849
Working more than 20 hours per	14	11.024	9	6.164
Missing	2	1.575	2	1.37
Currently on SNAP				
No	19	14.961	114	78.082
Yes	108	85.039	32	21.918
Ever on SNAP				
No	51	40.157	71	48.63
Yes	76	59.843	75	51.37

Major Themes

The following summarizes the major themes of focus group respondents' opinions about and reactions to various SNAP modernization efforts in the 14 case study states. Themes are organized around four major types of modernization efforts: (1) policy changes; (2) organizational changes and reengineering of administrative roles; (3) technological innovations; and (4) partnering arrangements.

I. Policy Changes

Initial Interviews/Recertification by Phone

Although focus group respondents' feedback on the ability to do an initial interview or recertification interview by phone often overlapped with conversations about call centers and phone systems, some respondents spoke specifically about the ability to interview by phone.

Challenges Noted:
➤ Frustrations with automated systems and desire to talk to a "live" person.

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> Frustrations with inconvenient pre-scheduled interview times.

Successes Noted:
> Not having to go to the local office and being able to avoid busy local offices and staff, long waiting times and transportation issues.
> Helpful staff on the phone and easy-to-use automated systems.

Simplified/Combined Applications

Some respondents, both participants and nonparticipants provided feedback about combined or shortened applications. Some respondents that had not used a combined application expressed a desire to be able to apply for several benefit programs at the same time.

Challenges Noted:
> Confusion about what parts of the application to complete if the respondent is only interested in applying for one benefit program. *"Well right now there is assistance all on that one application and did not know which parts needed to be filled out and which didn't."*

Successes Noted:
> Many focus group respondents reported that they learned about SNAP, and applied for SNAP while applying for another benefit program.
> Faster, simpler application process.

Extended Recertification Periods

Both SNAP participant and nonparticipant participant respondents noted changes in recertification periods. Feedback on longer recertification periods was generally very positive.

Challenges Noted:
> Confusion about why recertification periods changed.
> Confusion about new recertification requirements.
> Confusion when recertification periods for SNAP differ from recertification periods for other benefit programs.

Successes Noted:
> Less burden on recipients.
> Less paperwork.

II. Organizational Changes and Reengineering of Administrative Roles

Contracting Out Administrative Functions or Privatization

Focus group respondents in states that have contracted out much of their administrative functions were aware of the changes, and provided a substantial amount of feedback.

Challenges Noted:
- ➢ Poor customer service.
- ➢ Frustrations with a more computerized process; being directed to the phone or computer. *"When they switched from state run, they took away the personal touch. You talk to someone not even in this town. Telling me to go to the computer and find out, I don't even know how to turn it on. The first thing they tell you is pick up the phone."*
- ➢ Frustration with centralized processing that resulted in participants not being able to speak to workers in the local office.
- ➢ Problems with scanned documents being lost and/or not linked with the correct cases.

Changes in Office Hours (extended/flexible)

Very few focus group respondents discussed changes in office hours. In states where local offices have extended or flexible hours, some respondents had heard of the changes in hours and few said they used the new hours.

Case Management

In some states that had implemented workload management models where caseworkers no longer carry a designated caseload, several current SNAP participants in the focus groups had noticed the change. Their feedback was mixed.

Challenges Noted:
- ➢ Some participants felt they received better service with a dedicated caseworker, and miss the relationship they had with their caseworker. *"When you are talking to one caseworker, she understands you, then you come back in and get another that does not really know you, that was frustrating."*
- ➢ Confusion around why caseworkers change. *"I've been through quite a few caseworkers. I don't know if they have more work but my caseworker is always getting switched. If you ask me right now who my caseworker is, I have no clue. The last one I know. But anyone else, no clue. I think you have an intake caseworker, and then you are assigned a caseworker."*

Successes Noted:
- ➢ Improved customer service.
- ➢ Shortened wait times in the office. *"How do you like the new system, not having a case-manager? Everyone thinks this is better. Customer service is better. You don't have to wait for your caseworker; you go in and out [of the local office] faster."*
- ➢ More efficient application process and timeline for receiving benefits.

Waiting Room/Up-front Process Change/Change in Flow of Office

Focus group respondents, primarily SNAP participants, in many states noticed and provided feedback on the various changes that states have made in waiting rooms, office flow and up-front

processes. This was the administrative/organizational modernization activity most discussed in the focus groups.

Challenges Noted:
  ➢ Some confusion around the logic behind new waiting room triage systems. *"You would normally think they would take you in order of your number, but they don't. if you get out of your seat you lose it and if they call your number while out they make you go to the end of the line."*
  ➢ Some respondents felt that waiting room process changes had created longer lines.

Successes Noted:
  ➢ Some respondents in states that had implemented new up-front procedures reported a reduction in local office wait times. *"[The up-front process changed] then they changed it to appointments rather than first come first serve. Before I waited 2 to 3 hours. Now I have an appointment"*
  ➢ Respondents liked having a choice of appointment times.
  ➢ Separate lines for dropping off documents reduced wait times. *"I was in line and they asked if we were just dropping things off, it took less time."*
  ➢ Greeters in the waiting room reduced wait times and confusion about local office and application processes. *"Well there is a greeter here. She is very nice.... She'll be bouncing around helping people."*

Integration of Programs in Offices

Many respondents heard about SNAP, and received help with the application process from a social worker or caseworker when they went to apply for another program (Medicaid, WIC, SSI, cash assistance) or from a social worker as they were exiting the criminal justice system.

Accept Applications/Recertification by Fax

Focus group respondents in a handful of states talked about applying or recertifying for SNAP by fax.

Challenges Noted:
  ➢ Lost faxed-in verification documents resulting in a prolonged application process.
  ➢ Frustration with not getting verification that the documents have been received.

Successes Noted:
  ➢ More convenient with work schedules to be able to apply or recertify without going into the office.

Caseworkers Provide Email to Clients

No focus group respondents reported communicating with a caseworker via e-mail, but several mentioned that they would like to be able to do so.

Outstationed SNAP Workers

Some respondents in states with outstationed SNAP workers noted they had applied with an outstationed worker.

III. Technological Innovations

Call Centers

Both participants and nonparticipants had used call or change centers. This was one of the modernization effects most discussed in the focus groups. In every state that had implemented a call center, respondents had heard of or had contact with the system.

Challenges Noted:
- ➢ Prefer face-to-face, lost the "personal touch," and trust, and feeling that you get benefits faster/more efficiently if you talk face-to-face. *"I like face-to-face. I like talking directly to people. I'm not a phone person. The face-to-face is always wonderful. You get the aspect of what's happening. Phone calls are no good somehow. Sometimes you can, sometimes you can't. Leaving a message is no good sometimes."*
- ➢ Frustration with having to go into a local office to complete an interview with the call center.
- ➢ Frustrations with automated systems (following complicated phone trees, not being able to leave a message, losing spot in the queue if you hang up).
- ➢ Hard to get through to a caseworker or talk to a "real person."
- ➢ Long wait times—time on hold or waiting during a designated appointment time.
- ➢ Long waits use minutes on cell phone plans.
- ➢ Some clients have no phone.
- ➢ Long wait to hear back after leaving messages.

Successes Noted:
- ➢ Not having to go into the office for changes- easier for childcare, transportation, and work schedules. *"I love it because I don't have to go and sit, bother my friend [who drives her to the office] to sit all day. Then there is no problem—my [SNAP benefits] come the third of every month. I don't have to mess with mean people; everyone is nice on this toll free number."*
- ➢ When call or change centers operate smoothly (no long waits, ability to talk to a person if necessary, etc.) participants found them more convenient than going into the office.
- ➢ Some found the change or call center easier to get through to than contacting caseworkers directly.
- ➢ Availability of bilingual call center operators.

Document Imaging/Electronic Case Files

Most focus group respondents did not discuss these changes, but some were aware of the document imaging and electronic case files being used in their states, saying that verifications like birth certificates and employment information were "in the system."

Challenges Noted:
- ➢ Additional steps in the application process made it more likely that documents were lost or case files were incomplete, especially when documents were not scanned in front of the client.
- ➢ Having to bring in documents they believed they already provided.

Successes Noted:
- ➢ Less concern about local offices losing paper versions of verification documents.

Kiosks in the Office/Community

Some focus group respondents in states that had implemented kiosks in the local offices had encountered kiosks and provided feedback.

Challenges Noted:
- ➢ Lack of computer comfort or literacy. One participant suggested that touch screen kiosks were easier to operate than kiosks with a mouse.
- ➢ Some participants were not encouraged by local office staff to use the kiosks in the office, and some found it intimidating to have to take the initiative to use the kiosk.

Successes Noted:
- ➢ Some participants credited the kiosks with a faster-moving local office and shorter waiting times.

Online Application

Focus group respondents were mixed in their knowledge of and experience with online SNAP applications. In states with online applications, some SNAP participants and nonparticipants had heard of or used the online application, while others had not. Focus group facilitators asked respondents who had not heard of or used the online application if they would consider applying online. This was one of the modernization areas most discussed in the focus groups.

Challenges Noted:
- ➢ Difficulty finding online application.
- ➢ Lack of Internet access.
- ➢ Frustration with having to submit paperwork (signature page, printed out application or verifications) at the local office, starting the process online then having to wait in the local office. *"You can't submit online, so what's the difference. You still have to take it in."*

- ➢ Confusion around the application process, unclear application instructions.
- ➢ Computer literacy issues, frustration at being asked to apply online and having low computer literacy, lack of e-mail addresses. *"I hate it when everyone thinks the world knows how to use a computer. Don't know how to work one really good."*
- ➢ Frustration with online applications that do not save progress of uncompleted applications.
- ➢ Concerns about identity theft.

Successes Noted:
- ➢ Some participants appreciated being able to avoid going into the local office. Respondents felt that this saved time, and avoided childcare issues or the embarrassment they feel when going to the office.
- ➢ Some respondents liked being able to start the application process before going to the local office.
- ➢ Respondents were positive about applications that provided clear and thorough follow-up information after submitting the application online, including confirmation that the application has been received, a complete list of necessary verifications and information on how to submit them, and information on next steps in the application process including how and when the interview will be conducted.
- ➢ Some respondents felt that the online application made the application process faster.

Online Eligibility Calculators

Some focus group respondents had experience using online eligibility calculators available in their states. Some who had not used an online eligibility calculator expressed a desire for this kind of tool.

Challenges Noted:
- ➢ Computer literacy.
- ➢ Confusing instructions.
- ➢ Some participants had difficulty finding eligibility information online, including eligibility calculators.
- ➢ Frustration when the calculator said a applicant might qualify, and the applicant turned out to not qualify.

Successes Noted:
- ➢ Participants were very positive about the idea of being able to save a trip to the local office if they do not qualify. *"It would be nice to know if you have the chance [if you would be eligible], before spending the money to go down there."*

IV. Partnering Arrangements

The most common contact with SNAP partner agencies that respondents reported was either learning about SNAP or receiving help applying for SNAP through a partner agency, such as food banks and pantries, community-based organizations, clinics and doctors' offices and

libraries. Both participants and nonparticipants reported contact with partner agencies, and feedback was generally very positive.

Successes Noted:
- ➢ Respondents learned about SNAP.
- ➢ Respondents received help applying for SNAP, which many reported was faster, easier and more comfortable for them than applying at the local office.

V. Nonparticipant Experiences and Comments

Respondents in the nonparticipant focus groups provided feedback on their past experiences applying for SNAP and the reasons they are currently not participating in the program.

Reasons for Not Participating

- ➢ Many nonparticipant focus group respondents said that very small benefit levels made them disinclined to go through the hassle of applying. "*Would you consider applying again? No, because of my disappointment from before—the $10 benefit.*"
- ➢ Difficult, time consuming to gather all the required paperwork.
- ➢ Verifications, particularly proof of residence, identification, birth certificates and proof of income for self-employed applicants. "*Too much paperwork—running around to bank and getting letters; lease; rent; utilities just for $10—they ask you everything down to when you go to the bathroom.*"
- ➢ Many respondents said that SNAP benefits are only for "hard times," and that they don't apply to avoid taking the benefits from families that are more in need.
- ➢ Transportation.
- ➢ Time consuming and confusing paperwork.
- ➢ Office hours.
- ➢ Childcare issues, and reluctance to bring children to the local office.
- ➢ Embarrassed to go to the local office and to apply for assistance "*Some people think it's degrading to get assistance. A lot of people out of pride do not apply.*"
- ➢ Perception that receiving SNAP will put you in debt. "*If you get these service, down the road if you own anything, car, trailer, they come back and take it away from you*"
- ➢ Negative feedback from friends and family that have applied. "*I have gone to the churches and gotten the boxes of foods. They only give you canned foods. I would like to be able to get fresh food. I haven't actually applied for [SNAP] because I have heard that it is a hassle.*"
- ➢ Perception that benefit programs are for women and families "*I feel like [SNAP] is something you do with children. I don't have [SNAP]. I'm 42. I do what most folks do. I get work when I can.*"
- ➢ Felony convictions.
- ➢ Language barriers.

Application Experiences

- ➢ Negative experiences with local office staff.

- ➢ Long wait times.
- ➢ Frustration with change reporting, and a loss of privacy once you are participating in the program.
- ➢ Many respondents describe cycling on and off SNAP as they enter and exit employment.
- ➢ Confusion about how eligibility is determined and why different applicants get different levels of benefits.
- ➢ Confusion and frustration about the definition of household, particularly respondents living with roommates or in shelters.
- ➢ Many respondents expressed confusion and frustration over interactions between SNAP and other programs including Unemployment Insurance and SSDI. Respondents were confused and frustrated when income from another benefit program reduced or canceled their SNAP benefits.
- ➢ Frustration that some expenses are not included in the calculation of benefits, and that assets including cars are included.