



Change & Innovation Agency

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Case Study, WA:

Washington State Department of Social & Health Services Economic Services Administration, Community Services Division

Areas: Basic Food, Cash, Medical, TANF, Child Care

Agency Staff: 2700

Project Title: Service Delivery Review (SDR) Project

Timeframe: 2008-2010

Type of Services Provided

- Business process reengineering
- Assessment/Program Evaluation
- Statewide Process Redesign
- Leadership, Staff & local management Training
- Implementation Planning and “go-live” roll-outs in 4 offices
- Planning for statewide implementation

Project Overview

In the summer of 2008, Washington State knew they would soon be facing the impacts of the failing economy. Knowing caseloads would increase and budgets reduced, their leadership decided to conduct a review of their SNAP service delivery model to identify ways they could streamline services. This review was led by the Change & Innovation Agency (CIA).

The economic downturn drove an ever-increasing number of Washingtonians to seek access to much needed safety-net services (SNAP, Medicaid, Cash, Childcare, Energy Assistance, Employment & Training Services, etc.) administered at the state level through a network of 60 DSHS “Community Service Offices (CSOs).

The principal challenge facing Washington, like many other states and local governments across the nation, was one of capacity – having to withstand an unprecedented increase in the demand for services with less staff and diminishing resources.

As predicted, Washington State soon faced 40% increases in applications, budget cuts, hiring freezes, and a 20% vacancy rate. Additionally, their operational structure and procedures had resulted in:

- Customers regularly waiting 20+ days for an eligibility determinations
- 60 different ways of delivering service (local office autonomy)
- Inconsistent processes and procedures for verifying client information, processing applications and maintaining cases
- Increasing error rates

Washington embarked on an effort to reengineer their business practices resulting in a service delivery model where the processes of Intake, Interviews, Verification and Eligibility, Re-certifications and Changes were managed. By 2010, Washington had rolled all 60 CSOs into the new service delivery model. Washington realized that the previous business model for determining eligibility and managing public assistance case-loads was not designed to handle the pressures presented by double digit increases in workload and devastating staffing reductions.

Challenges

- Staffing levels that do not keep pace with caseload increases
- Quality and timeliness that is adversely impacted by the workload increases
- Well intended technology projects that have not always delivered as promised
- Multiple customer contacts, either in person or over the phone, before completing an eligibility determination
- Large backlogs and unfinished determinations (pending cases), which in many circumstances represent cases that are ready to be worked because the customer turned in the required information – further increasing the number of unnecessary customer contacts
- Large variance in how staff perform the work

Washington's reengineering blended well with their ongoing efforts to modernize through technology the delivery of human services and public assistance programs. Their vision included providing customers with multiple access points throughout their local offices, hospitals, and community-based organizations along with the use of technology (telephony, online, imaging) to facilitate such access. Concurrently, radical changes in business practices were being developed and implemented to speed up the eligibility determination process and link families faster to services through the multiple access points.

Tasks Performed

In the summer of 2008, Washington State and the Change & Innovation Agency (CIA) began to analyze DSHS' most important eligibility practices to determine different strategies for processing the work. This business process reengineering (BPR) effort consisting of eligibility line staff, team supervisors, office managers, and administrative staff followed a structured approach for identifying opportunities and devising a new set of business practices. Every step and interaction was focused on evaluating the processes and systems in which staff do the eligibility work and developing/implementing a plan to bring improvements and increased efficiency. The major tasks performed during the life cycle of the project included:

- Local Office Assessments. CIA conducted assessments of CSO operations and reviewed lobby workflow, staffing processes and procedures, and management's processes for operations. Office operation reports were developed and provided.
- Strategy Sessions with leadership to develop a plan of action and approach were conducted. These strategy sessions consisted of identifying the current state, ideal future state, and barricades to reaching the desired state.
- Redesign Teams were created to analyze work processes in detail and design new processes that were faster, more accurate, flexible, and focused on using precious eligibility worker time only on value-added tasks. Teams conducted as-is process mapping, and identified barriers, bottlenecks, backlog and inefficiencies.
- Pilot Planning and Preparation was conducted to help Washington implement the new processes and business model developed by the redesign team in 5 CSOs located in Seattle (2), Tacoma (2), and Vancouver. This phase included implementing service strategies needed to ensure a successful statewide rollout at the remaining 55 offices statewide.
- Full Implementation Planning and Support for Rollout statewide was conducted. Readiness task lists were developed for each office along with backlog reduction plans and training on the new processes and procedures. Conducted weekly teleconferences with roll-out teams.

Outcomes

Washington started transitioning in 2009 to their new service delivery model. The new processes focused on freeing up administrative capacity and improving quality by streamlining the most important eligibility practices and processes: Initial Application and Interviews; Verification and eligibility Decisions; Maintenance and Re-certification. Outcomes included:

- Provide customers with same-day service and on-demand interviewing/processing at all community service offices – Washington successfully eliminated the practice of scheduling appointments to conduct interviews for all new/initial applications and renewals from existing customers (walk-in and telephone). Customers are seen, or interviewed over the phone, as they come-in or call. In most cases the applications and renewals are processed same day and the customers leave with a completed eligibility determination.
- Reduced the average time to process applications and issue benefits by 65% – from 18 days to 3 days
- Increased the percentage of families receiving benefits on same-day of application from 50% to 80%
- Improved SNAP Payment accuracy from 96% to 98.2%
- Reduced the average wait time in the eligibility call center by 35% – from 8 minutes to less than 5 minutes
- Achieved administrative efficiencies in excess of \$32 million
- Mitigated caseload increases of 30% and staffing losses of 15% (300 positions)
- Developed tools to bring consistency to the eligibility determination work
- Developed standard operating procedures
- Identified and documented best practices.