BUSINESS PROCESS REDESIGN IN CONNECTICUT

99% average timeliness for SNAP applications

Same-day service and on-demand interviewing and processing at all local offices

Client
State of Connecticut, Department of Social Services (DSS)

Timeframe
2013 to 2014

Project Overview
Economic conditions created by the recession of 2007 to 2009 resulted in dramatic public assistance program growth across the country, and Connecticut followed the national trend. As of March 2016, the Connecticut DSS was providing SNAP benefits to more than 437,000 individuals, a 106% increase in the agency's SNAP caseload since before the recession. Notably, these figures did not reflect the work required for processing applications that are ultimately denied, indicating that the total demand for services was even higher. DSS also faced challenges commensurate with Connecticut's expansion of Medicaid eligibility under the ACA. Today, Connecticut is serving 48% (or 215,491) more Medicaid households than before the 2013 implementation of Medicaid expansion. Together, 224,572 more SNAP individuals and 215,491 more Medicaid households[1] – more than half a million more Connecticut residents – are receiving benefits through a service delivery system with staffing levels that remained unchanged. DSS was also subject to a temporary FNS injunction due to a systemic failure to process SNAP applications timely.

Beginning in 2013, the Connecticut DSS partnered with Change & Innovation Agency (C!A®) to embark on an effort to redesign its business/eligibility processes with the goal of increasing its staffing capacity to withstand workload increases and program complexity.

Tasks
C!A assessed the eligibility operations at DSS to identify organizational strengths, challenges, and potential recommendations for moving Connecticut to a place of operational excellence. We concluded that restructured public assistance delivery processes had the potential to improve quality and timeliness by allowing workers to focus on the "real" work of interviewing, verifying, and processing applications.

Following the assessment phase, a comprehensive Business Process Redesign (BPR) effort was initiated to redesign the key business processes in DSS service delivery. The BPR effort recommended to leadership that DSS implement a process management model that frees up administrative capacity and improves quality by streamlining the most important eligibility practices and processes: initial application and interviews, verification and eligibility decisions, and maintenance and re-certifications.

The major tasks performed during the lifecycle of the project included:

+ Assessment of local office operations and staff
+ Strategy sessions with leadership to develop a plan of action and approach

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[1] The average Medicaid household is estimated at 1.75 individuals.

+ Redesign teams to create work processes that are faster, more accurate, flexible, and focused on using precious eligibility worker time only on value-added tasks. As-is process mapping was conducted, barriers and bottlenecks were identified, and new processes were developed.
+ Full implementation planning, preparation, and rollout support to implement the new processes and business model developed by the redesign team
+ Post-implementation reviews, assessment, and consultation
+ Monitoring and oversight of operations

Outcomes

Before engaging C!A, Connecticut was facing a federal class action lawsuit and penalties for not providing benefits in a timely manner. Due to our redesign of DSS' processes, the state is no longer being sued and avoided federal penalties.

Connecticut began transitioning to its new service delivery model in 2014. With redesigned processes that eliminated unnecessary customer interactions and freed up staff time, Connecticut improved its SNAP timeliness rate from 57% in FY 2013 (53rd in the nation) to 99% state rate upper bound in FY 2015 (5th in the nation). Additional project outcomes included:

+ Providing increased access to – and participation in – SNAP while maintaining a high rate of accuracy in the calculation and issuance of SNAP benefits
+ Reducing the per case cost to determine SNAP eligibility
+ Providing same-day service and on-demand interviewing and processing at all local offices
+ Achieving consistency in eligibility work, due to the development of new staff tools
+ Mitigating the effects of increased caseload across all programs