SOUTHERN AREA CONSORTIUM OF HUMAN SERVICES

Review of the Research: Call Centers and Web-based Eligibility Systems

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Background

The Importance of Improving Access to Benefits

- Tremendous increase in the number of families seeking assistance
- States are faced with higher caseloads coupled with record deficits and reduced staff capacity
- Analyses have shown that providing additional income and supports, through benefit access and maximization projects, is an effective way of helping low-wage working families, particularly children, to move out of poverty. (Boots, 2010, p. 11)
- Enrolling more people in the Food Stamp Program (also federally known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program –SNAP and in California as the CalFresh Program) helps not just the individuals receiving benefits, but the economy as a whole. Federal food stamp dollars spent by recipients have a multiplier effect in the economy, as they inject money into local business and free up households' budgets to spend more on essential goods and services other than food.
    - USDA estimates that every $1 in food stamp benefits generates $1.84 in economic activity, which also benefits local and state government through sales tax revenues. (Dean, 2010)
        - Using the USDA economic multiplier estimate, that translates into $798,913,222 in extra economic activity for California in one month alone. (Shadix, 2010, p. 6)
- Increases timeliness of Food Stamp services provided to those in need:
    - In 2008, 16 states met 90% timeliness, down from 28 in 2006
    - Numerous states are facing timeliness lawsuits
    - CA ranked 47 out of 53 at 79% (in 2008)
- Improves the customer’s experience/satisfaction level

In many States/Counties families still navigate a complicated route to benefits:
(Dean, 2010)

- In-person interviews
- Fingerprinting
- Excessive verification
- Onerous reporting
- Churning on and off benefits

Participation in benefit programs, such as the Food Stamps Program, has traditionally required individuals to submit an application, participate in an interview at initial application and at least annually, provide verification of certain information, report certain changes in household circumstances while receiving benefits, and reapply for benefits at the end of the certification period (recertification). This application and recertification process has traditionally involved visiting the local assistance office in person for interviews or to submit applications and other documentation. (GAO, 2007, p.1)

Such complex processes pose accessibility challenges for many individuals applying for benefits. In particular, "elderly individuals, non-citizens that may have limited English proficiency and working families have consistently participated at lower rates than the eligible population as a whole. Even though there are many reasons people may not participate in the program, some research has shown that the administrative burden of applying for and maintaining eligibility for benefits may be a factor, particularly for people who are elderly or who work during the hours local public assistance offices are open." (GAO, 2007, p.1)

Path to benefits could be more straightforward and simpler by redesigning the process. Simpler means, where possible:
(Dean, 2010)

- Coordinated rules
- Fewer transactions
- Less required paperwork
- Fewer redundant steps (minimize steps and time to do a job)
- Reduced verification (overall and duplicative)
- Use information in one program for another
- Automate redundant tasks
- Reduce multiple trips to the office
- More efficient caseworkers
- Proactive steps saving work later in the process
- Out of office service

Shaw's nationwide research (2009) found that 70-80 percent of the people in line at SNAP offices- simply should not be there at all. Fewer than 3 out of 10 visitors are there to apply for benefits, yet all 10 are being poured into the already overflowing case manager glasses. Why is everyone else there?

1. Because we take too long-More than 40% of the visitors to the office are there to ask "where's my stuff?"
2. Because we cannot get it done on the first try-Seven out of 10 customers typically cannot complete the application on the first try and have to interact with us again-clogging the lobby, phone lines and mailboxes
3. Because we are late renewing customers-A majority of those (70–80 percent) will be back in the office in less than three months to start a new application

According to Shaw, most of the work flooding SNAP offices is because of the agencies own processes, policies and constraints. And the biggest constraint is the business model—case management. His research emphasizes that, "it's vastly more important that we develop good business processes than automate something that just isn't working for today's demands…Fix the business processes first, and then enhance with technology." (See *Appendix A: SNAP Offices -The Case for Process Management*) (Shaw, 2009)

Overall Goals of Call-Centers/Web-based Eligibility Systems
(Hoffman, 2006)

- <u>More efficient service:</u> Increase client access (allow many transactions to occur without the need for the client to appear in a local office), ensure accurate and timely resolutions to inquiries and transactions, increase capacity, reduce administrative and facility costs, and decrease workload. Through the integration of services, redundancies and expenses can be reduced for states/counties, and programs can become more user-friendly for eligible families to obtain multiple benefits.

Where to Start/Considerations
(Hoffman, 2006; Rowe, 2010)

When improving coordination among benefit programs for low-income families, states should consider factors such as the following:

- time and resources required to make changes;
- possibility of needing to obtain federal waivers;
- changes in computer systems;
- agreements regarding information sharing protocols and policy/procedure changes; and
- an alternative to obtaining benefits other than online for clients without computer access.

By improving, integrating and streamlining access to an array of benefits, state leaders can ensure low-income individuals and families receive the assistance they need. Some of the specific areas where states/counties should look to align policies include benefit eligibility requirements and definitions, verification processes, and renewal procedures (Hoffman, 2006). Below are some suggested starting points for States and Counties:
(Hoffman, 2006; Rowe, 2010; Manalo-LeClair, 2008)

1. Identify some specific tradeoffs /tensions in modernizing the program
2. Adopt client's perspective
    - Walk in the client's shoes to identify "risk" points, clogs, and kinks in the system (design systems around the consumer)
    - Identify and respond to trends in client feedback surveys (e.g. complaints)
    - Consider the needs of all types of households when developing alternative ways of accessing food stamp benefits (e.g. access to internet, language needs, etc.)
3. Understand State options and policies
    - State options and policy waivers (e.g. guidelines for face-to-face interview waivers; finger imaging, telephonic and electronic signatures, etc.)
4. Organizational changes/reengineering
    - Administrative functions
        - Create a "to-do list" of simplification policies to pave the way for future modernization efforts
        - Restructure the upfront client management process in local offices
        - Implement new strategies for more efficient workload management
            - Specialized staff
            - Refined interview guidelines
            - Face-to-Face interview waivers
            - Method of task allocation
        - Simplify the application and certification process to improve access
    - Technological innovations-The use of technology can greatly reduce barriers associated with the fragmented nature of benefit programs, some suggestions include:
        - Client self-service and lobby kiosks

        - Call centers
        - Interactive Voice Response (IVR)
        - Online benefit tools
            - Online screening tools to determine eligibility (e.g. single centralized verification system)
            - Single application for multiple programs
            - Benefit calculators
            - Ability to submit online applications
            - Electronic signature capability
            - Client access to case records (self-check)
        - Electronic case file management (paperless systems)
            - Document imaging
            - Bar-Coding
    - Staff training/Develop expertise
    - Partnering arrangements
        - Use CBO's as portals: Develop partnerships with community-based organizations, other government agencies, and businesses to provide additional access points and application assistance
        - Share promising practices/resources/tools (e.g. participate in annual California Statewide Food Stamp Modernization Symposia, jointly sponsored by CDSS, CWDA, and USDA)

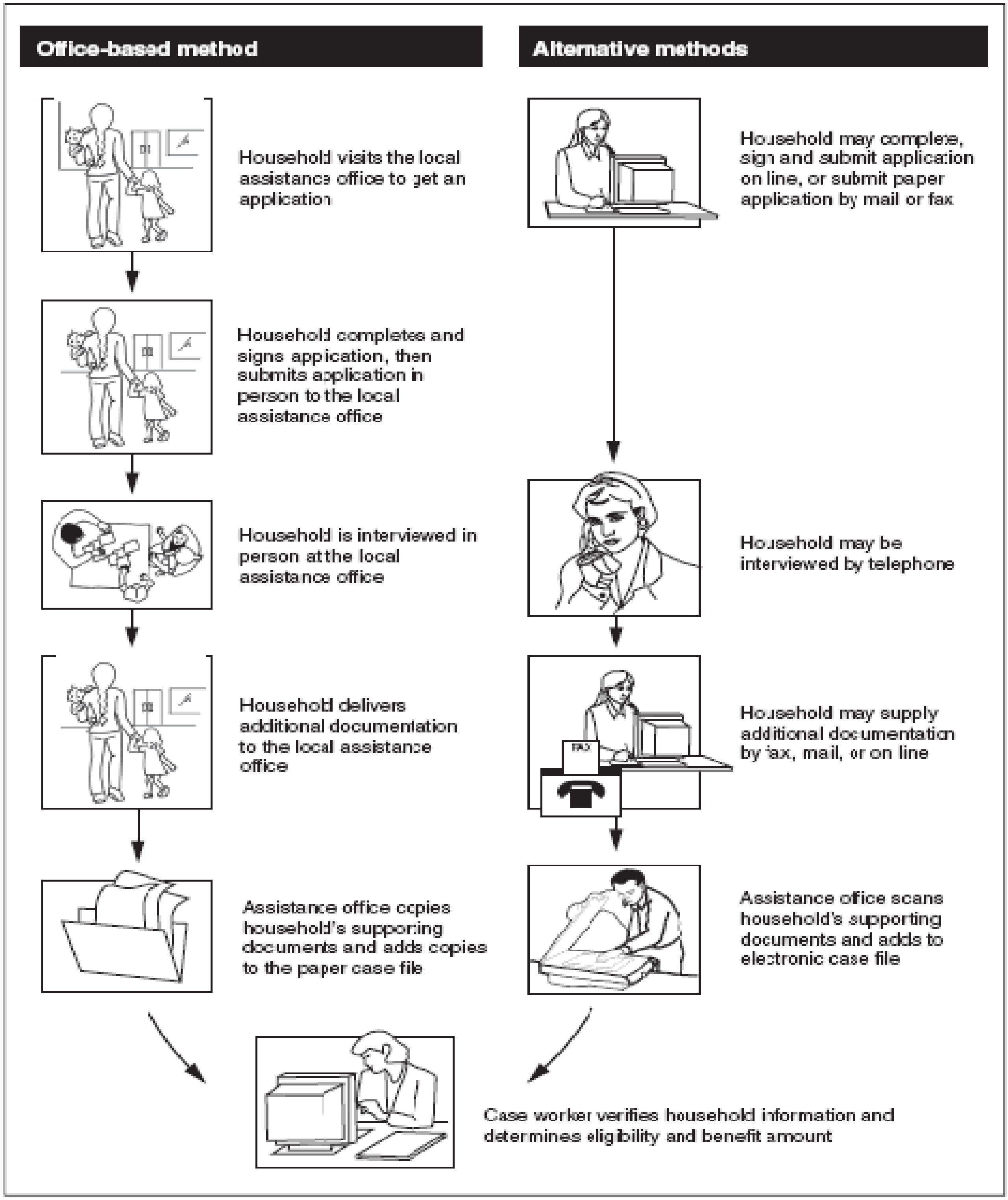
Technology: Improving the Benefit Process
(Winch, 2008; GAO, 2007)

Many states/counties clients are or are striving to allow potential clients to choose how they want to apply for services –in person, by phone, through the mail or over the Internet. In particular, there has been a recent move toward implementing call centers that allow clients to call one toll-free number for their state/county to obtain information on multiple benefits that they might be eligible to receive.

In 2008, Winch surveyed state food stamp administrators, analyzed USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) data and reports, and interviewed program officials and stakeholders (Full Report can be found here: http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07573.pdf)/). Winch found in the five states she reviewed in-depth (Florida, Texas, Utah, Washington and Pennsylvania), officials and community partners said that adopting state call centers that allow telephone interviews is found especially beneficial for working families and the elderly because they reduce barriers from transportation, child care, or work responsibilities, as well as the stigma of visiting the assistance office.

State officials in Florida explained that a working individual can complete a phone interview during their lunch break without taking time off of work to wait in line at the assistance office. In addition, state officials in Florida said that online services help elderly households that have designated representatives to complete the application on their behalf. For example, an elderly individual's adult child who is the appointed designated representative but lives out-of-state can apply and recertify for food stamp benefits for their parent without traveling to Florida. In addition to encouraging people to submit initial applications, telephone-based food stamp services have the potential to prevent clients from "falling off," or losing benefits at recertification. (GAO, 2007)

: Office-based Method Compared with Alternative Methods of Applying for Food Stamp Benefits



Source: GAO analysis.

However, officials and community partners also indicate that while it has the potential to improve access for certain types of households, some individuals with limited English proficiency, the elderly, households with very low income, and those with mental disabilities- who do not have a designated representative, may have more difficulty using online applications and navigating call center phone systems.

Few states or counties collect demographic information on households that use their call centers and online services, however collecting demographic information on the characteristics of these applicants could help inform service-delivery gaps, identifying which individuals may have difficulty using or accessing alternative methods. This knowledge can then inform future outreach by agencies (GAO, 2007).

Assess Available Technology and Staff
(GAO, 2007)

The advantages of alternative methods to households also may depend on the technology and staff available. For example, online applications without electronic signature capability have limited benefit because households are required to also submit an actual signature through mail, fax, or in person. Further, inadequate numbers of staff and unskilled staff may limit the advantages of alternative methods because households may not be able to receive the information and assistance needed to successfully apply for or maintain benefits. (GAO, 2007)

Impact on Denials
(GAO, 2007)

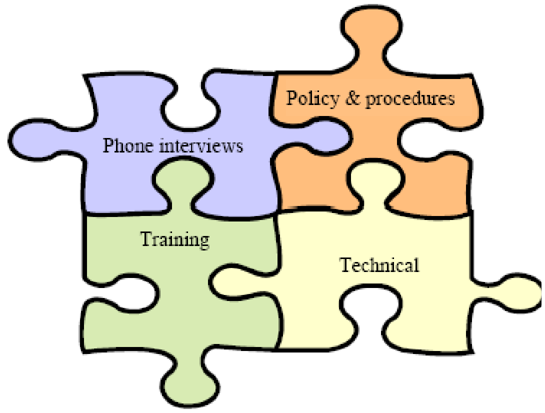
Although there has been some concern that without frequent in-person interaction with caseworkers, households may not submit required documents on time and thus be denied benefits on procedural grounds ("procedural denials"), GAO's limited analysis of Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) data found no considerable fluctuations in the rate of procedural denials in the five states between fiscal years 2000 and 2005.

Data-matching Software
(GAO, 2007; Winch, 2008)

States/counties use software to help with verification of household circumstances by, for example, matching state food stamp caseloads against wage reporting systems and other databases to identify unreported household income and assets. It is highly recommended to use state and federal computer matches to reduce requirements for verification, as Florida has done in its Simplified Elderly Application Demonstration Project (Winch, 2008). In addition, to states/ counties using databases to verify information provided by households and to follow up on discrepancies between information reported by the household and information obtained from other sources some use finger imaging, electronic signatures, and special verification techniques to validate the identity of households using call centers or online services. (GAO, 2007)

State and local food stamp officials believed that using alternative methods had not increased the frequency of fraud and abuse in the program because the verification process is the same whether or not a worker sees an individual face-to-face. (GAO, 2007)

Call Centers: Necessary Supports
(MA Department of Nutrition Assistance, 2010; Story, 2010; Nevada Division of Welfare, 2010)



- Technical
    - Wireless, hands-free headsets
    - Telephone upgrades to address issues with voicemail, out-of-state area codes, caller ID blocking, etc.
    - Limited English Proficiency (LEP) considerations, Language Line, etc.
    - Data matching systems including software either developed by the state or obtained through a third-party vendor to help with verification of household circumstances.
        - Match state benefit caseloads against wage reporting systems and other databases to verify and identify unreported household income and assets (GAO, 2007)
    - Interactive Voice Response (IVR) Technology
    - Document imaging
- Operational
    - Supportive office configurations
    - Resources, eligibility worker assignment schedules, etc.
    - Desk reference system for important documents that staff has to quickly refer to while on a call
    - Ergonomic evaluations of all staff workstations
    - Refined interview guidelines
- Staff Development/Training Process
    - Develop guides with general interviewing skills as well as listening skills
    - Develop *Standard Interview Protocol*/Script
        - Massachusetts Department of Nutrition Assistance has developed a one page quick reference guide for workers with *Helpful Hints for Telephone Interviews* (See *Appendix B*)
    - Orientation/Training process for new eligibility worker
        1. Provide specialized interview training (e.g. how to verify callers' identities by asking for specific personal information available in the file or in the states' records; how to detect when misinformation is being provided by a household; how to request more information if needed to clarify discrepancies in the case, etc)
        2. Eligibility worker-thoroughly review interview protocol/ scripts

3. Observe and listen to other call center eligibility workers
4. Take calls with another call center eligibility worker
    - The experienced call center eligibility worker /trainer is listening most of the time on the phone providing feedback to the eligibility worker (e.g. with instant messaging to communicate with trainee)
5. Supervisor/trainer-daily review of calls for 1 month
6. Ongoing random listening/feedback by supervisor/trainer
    - Fresno County's DSS Change Center developed a *Review Sheet for Live Call Monitors* (see *Appendix C*) that is used by supervisors to review live calls of their staff to ensure the quality of the call, and then review with respective workers in supervision (Story, 2010)
    - Tulare County reviews previously recorded calls (3 per month per worker), and provide one-on-one coaching sessions within 48 hours of the call that is reviewed. The worker can listen to the call with the supervisor. (Blackmon, 2010)

- Ongoing policy refreshers
- Call processing summary sheet
- Job aids

- <u>Pre-filled recertification forms</u>
    - To prevent reentry, use existing information from case record to pre-populate recertification forms
- <u>System-generated appointment letters (telephone and face-to-face)</u>
    - While caseworkers are trained to inform households of all deadlines, an application tracking software can automatically generate a list of households that are near or past due, or interview dates to send reminder notices to them.
- <u>Policy/procedural changes</u>
    - Verification "reforms"
    - Telephonic signatures
    - F2F Waiver
    - Finger Imaging
- <u>Other considerations</u>
    - Modernization (document imaging)
    - Policy initiatives to streamline processing
    - Eligibility worker specialization (case banking)
    - Cultural mindset (buy in from the top-down)

Call Centers: Interactive Voice Response (IVR) Technology

- Following the lead of many businesses, Interactive Voice Response (IVR) or specialized technologies were designed to enable self-service of callers, without the assistance of human agents. The IVR technology helps call centers prevent costs from rising (and often reduce costs), while hopefully improving service levels. (Polina, Feign & Mandelbaum, 2009)

- To more effectively use eligibility staff's time, IVR allows for clients to access benefit information via telephone, and can allow clients to manage elements of their own cases from checking the status of documents to conducting recertification interviews without directing the caller to a live person (although many IVR's do have an option to transfer out of IVR to the call center to speak with a live person).
- Availability in most California counties is available now for incoming calls, and many counties are developing outgoing IVR call capability (CWDA Food Stamps Website, 2010).
    - ACCESS CalWIN IVR, implemented in mid June 2010 provides IVR technology (self-service benefit information via phone) to all the CalWIN Counties (see list of CalWIN Counties here: www.benefitscalwin.org)

Applications that may run on the IVR servers include:
(Penn, 2009).

- The Answer Phone: provides clients with basic information about their case, hear messages from their worker, hear appointment information, find out if their documents were received and acted upon, and receive information about their benefits. The Answer Phone should be available whenever the clients want to call (24 hrs/day, 7 days/week).
- Child Care Information Phone: Providers call this application to check on authorized service and approval periods, as well as co-payment amounts.
- Zip Code Router: When clients are unknown to the system, their calls are routed to local catchment areas based on the zip code the caller enters. This functionality enables one toll-free number to be used for the entire state.
- Customer Survey: is an application that gathers customer responses over the phone. It was designed to be used in two ways:
    - Stay on the line survey: Incorporated into call flows so a caller can stay on the line after conducting their business and answer a few questions.
    - Callback: The system calls customers back to ask and then record their responses. This automated survey is an excellent tool for call centers to use to gather customer feedback.

How to Make the Best Use of IVR Technology
(Katch, Morse, & *Sinclair, 2009)*

- While IVR technology can enable self-service and thereby increase agent capacity, it also became a persistent pain point for callers.
    - When the most popular inquiries are not listed first, callers have to listen to options that are irrelevant to what they need.
    - When the options are wordy, riddled with jargon or unclear terminology, and sometimes redundant, callers are left unsure about which buttons to press.
    - Burdensome security requirements—for example, callers had to provide an obscure personal identification number (PIN)—can lead many callers to simply hang up.
        - Tests indicate that asking more intuitive but equally robust security questions (for instance, a Social Security number and date of birth, rather than a PIN) for certain automated transactions can dramatically increase IVR utilization and completion rates

- Simplifying the IVR menus is imperative, but security is also a real concern for agencies. The automation of the most common transactions, which is one of the best ways to increase agent capacity, has to be carefully evaluated because of potential security breaches.
- For one large government agency, by making the IVR menu options clearer and more concise, eliminating or replacing confusing terms and agency jargon, and putting the simplest and highest-volume inquiries first, the agencies reduced the time an average caller spends in the IVR by up to 30 percent, and enabled up to 24 percent more callers to get to the right place the first time. Making options clearer and more concise transformed their frustrating experience into a customer-friendly one.

Workload Management
(Blackmon, 2010)

- For example of effective workload management, Tulare County's TulareWORKs Call Center achieved substantial client service and productivity improvements by reengineering how work is allocated, assigned, and measured:
    - Their county's Medi-Cal and Food Stamps caseloads were increasing at a rate of 61% from 6/06 to 6/07 and the positions available to assist them was decreasing at rate of 23%; leading to caseloads increasing, backlogs developing, increased client complaints, and a demoralized workforce. The conventional individual caseload model was not a viable solution, and saw a definite need to improve the measures used to determine the productivity and quality of work, while also reengineering the way they allocate and do the work. The other focus was developing a system staff felt was equitable and fair-"everyone does their fair share of the work."
    - Standardizing an efficient Method of Task Allocation has saved $90,000 annually or roughly 3 full time clerical support positions.

Method of Task Allocation
(Blackmon, 2010)

- There are two basic mechanisms for work distribution or allocation in a workflow system:
    - Push mechanism: A work item is pushed to a single resource.
        - The push mechanism means only one resource is told to complete a work item. It suffers from the drawback that if an item is "pushed" to a worker who is on vacation/out sick, this item could be sitting in the workbasket of this worker until he/she returns from his/her absence.
    - Pull mechanism: A resource pulls work items from a common pool of work items.
        - With a pull mechanism, multiple workers are "offered" this work item and chances are higher that one of them will be available to perform it. Therefore, consider the pull mechanism as the basic paradigm for work distribution because this mechanism gives more flexibility.
        - Staff will "pull" tasks from a unit pool and no longer get "pushed" individual task assignments. Unit pools allow individuals in the unit an opportunity to complete any given task assigned to the unit.
        - This requires and fosters teamwork within each unit.

                - Tasks which are in most need of completion can be addressed by the unit instead of one single worker.
                    - Each supervisor will be responsible for monitoring the assignments in their unit pool. They will direct their staff to work the task load from the unit pools and manage the unit task load.
                        - Note: Experience/knowledge level, vacancies, initiative of the individuals, number of calls answered, and days off; prevents an even ratio of work completed by staff

- *"Group" lines*
  (Blackmon, 2010)
    - A "Group" line is a unit specific phone extension. When the "Group" line is dialed it will ring on all the phones within a unit simultaneously until the call is answered. The first individual to answer is the one who receives the call.
        - When a call transfer becomes necessary, the "Group" phone line will better facilitate transfers to a unit when it is necessary to receive assistance from an individual within a unit to help provide more timely and accurate assistance to our clientele. "Group" line
        - A "Group" line is a unit specific phone extension. When the "Group" line is dialed it will ring on all the phones within a unit simultaneously until the call is answered. The first individual to answer is the one who receives the call.
        - Group lines are also used to call staff for back-up phone coverage.
        - Process for using "Group" lines:
            1. Attempt to resolve the call without a transfer.
                - Read available Case Comments, if the phone call is related to a recently processed task, the Case Comment should provide you the information to resolve the call without a transfer.
            2. Contact the individual assigned the task by calling the individual's extension, before the "Group" line is used.
                - Is it assigned to them on Task Management Tool (TMT)?
                - Did they write case comments that they are working on the task?
            3. After an attempted transfer to the individual is unsuccessful, attempt to transfer the call using the "Group" line.
                - No blind transfers- Make sure someone picks up the line, explain the reason for the transfer, and give them the case specifics.
                - No debates- Receivers of the transferred calls should not try to discourage the Sender from transferring the call; nor should they tell the Sender to rely information back and forth to the client (remember the client is on hold while the debate is taking place).
                - Worker's concerns over why a call was transferred should be addressed to a supervisor, after worker has assisted the client with their needs.

- Thorough case comments reduce the need to transfer calls. If worker's case comment does not clearly explain what is needed, the transfer may become necessary.
- Clientele sometimes do insist on speaking to the individual completing the task.

Successful Call Management
(Blackmon, 2010)

- What does it look like? (Blackmon, 2010)
  - The amount of tasks completed per month by an individual, a unit, and the service center as a whole increases.
  - Workers have an understanding and approval of how tasks are allocated.
  - Workers working together to complete a common goal and striving to keep the common workload manageable.
  - Supervisor able to have the confidence and reassurance in their staff to seek the tasks out instead of pushing tasks upon them.

- The Utility Tool (Blackmon, 2010)
  - Software program developed by Tulare County IT which allows mass electronic importation and assignment of tasks into a Task Management Tool (TMT), while previously each task had to be manually inputted one at a time. For Tulare County the Utility Tool increased the efficiency in which assignment and delivery of tasks to case managers. An example is Fallon F, a Self Sufficiency Support Assistance, assigned 1,573 tasks out of 10,512 overall tasks assigned in May 2008 (14%) prior to the use of the Utility tool and using the Utility tool she assigned 5,144 tasks out of 13,931 overall tasks assigned in May 2009 (36%). Her efficiency to assign work improved 227%.

- Monitor Average Handle Time (Blackmon, 2010)
  - Average Handle Time (AHT) is the total handle time divided by the total number of calls handled. Handle time is length that the eligibility worker spends on a call talking, while the client is on hold, and completing after call work in "Work" mode per call.
  - When it comes to achieving service level goals, AHT has a strong influence. In Tulare County, history shows their service level goes down as their AHT has gone up. The longer it takes to handle each call, the more staff we will need to handle all the calls or service level drops. If AHT is reduced overall, improved service level managing the total call volume will occur (TulareWORKs current goal is 7.5 minutes AHT).
  - AHT is important to measure as it helps predict the amount of staff needed throughout a time frame to handle calls on a flow basis minimizing the delay of answering calls, which greatly impacts customer service.

- Productivity Calculator for measuring efficiency (Blackmon, 2010)
  - Tulare County developed an Excel spreadsheet that enables easy comparisons of tasks completed per working FTE hours each month at the individual, unit, and center level. This Productivity Calculator compares the amount of completed

tasks and handled phone calls of an individual by the amount of hours the individual worked in a month considering the total available hours to work.

- The Excel spreadsheet lists every individual by: employee name, worker number, and unit; that completed tasks or handled phone calls in the month, including Supervisors and Support Assistants. For TulareWORKs, the spreadsheet data is inputted from the following three data sources Task Management Tool (TMT), Cisco Historical Reports, and ETIME (Payroll system) to calculate individual employee and unit efficiencies.
- Sample view of TulareWORKs Productivity Calculator:

March-09									
Counselor Number	Counselor Name	Unit Nam	Completed Tasks	Answered Phone Calls	FT Work Hours	Work FTE	Task by FTE	Phone by FTE
MP27	Doe, Jane	MP2	170	593	166.5	0.95	179.70	626.83
MP22	Doe, John	MP2	192	522	150.7	0.86	224.23	609.64

- Productivity Calculator shifts the focus of measuring performance on the outputs of staff and what staff accomplish, while they were at work (the positive); instead of focusing on what has not been completed and what is not being done, when they are not at work (the negative). When employees become aware that you are measuring them on what they "do", instead of what they "don't do" they will "do" more.
    - Recently the Productivity Calculator has taken into consideration the following factors: Vacancies, Phone Agent Responsibilities, Level of Experience, and Special Ad hoc work assignments not tracked that may influence employee's productivity ratings.
- Percentages versus actual numbers allows informing an employee where they are within their unit compared to unit overall without sharing scores with staff and provides a way of recognizing and awarding efficiency. It also allows percentage standards of acceptable performance when the volume of work assigned to staff increases and decreases.
    - Anyone below the unit average should be informed for coaching and counseling to allow them the opportunity to increase their productivity. Potential performance problems are 50% and below. For those above the average, there is an opportunity for recognition, especially in performance evaluations.

Document Imaging

- Currently many states/counties are using document imaging, or the process of scanning paper documents (e.g. client files) to convert them to digital images and then storing electronically.
- Document imaging allows counties to access client information more quickly, and from multiple locations, to improve client service and county efficiency (CWDA Food Stamps Website, 2010)

- In 2007, the GAO Report authors found that 11 states (21 percent) were using document management/imaging systems that allow case records to be maintained electronically rather than in paper files (likely much higher today).
- Call centers that do not have access to electronic records may not be as effective at answering callers' questions.
  - Officials from Washington State and federal officials from an FNS regional office view the use of a document management/imaging system as a vital part of the call center system.
  - Florida advocates said that households have received wrong information from call center agents and attribute the complaints in part to call center agents not having access to real-time electronic case records.
- Winch (2008) recommends that California develop a *statewide* document imaging and management system, which would allow eligibility staff at call centers across the state to access and update clients' accounts.

Measures to Monitor Call Center's Performance

- In 2007, the GAO Report authors found that States reported monitoring several aspects of the performance of their call centers.
  - Most commonly states and counties with call centers report monitoring:
    - Number of transactions completed through call center
    - Number of calls answered during a specified time period
    - Abandonment rate
    - Call length
    - Average answer speed
    - Hold time
    - Accuracy of information provided by call center staff
    - Number of calls transferred to other systems
    - Administrative cost savings
    - Payment accuracy
    - Timeliness of application processing
    - Number of times an individual client calls about a particular issue
    - Rate of first contact resolution
    - Customer satisfaction
  - For quality assurance, some of the elements listed above are often prepared and reported via a Monthly Dashboard Report format, and then shared with staff.
    - For example, see: *Appendix D-San Francisco County Food Assistance Service Center: Monthly Dashboard Report* (O'Farrell, 2010)
- Other outcomes to monitor (less measurable)
  (Kunz, 2010)
    - Improved access
    - Re-evaluations timely (no interruptions)
    - Greater flexibility (implement change quickly)
    - Greater capacity (productivity increased)
    - Greater consistency (easier to navigate)
    - Improved staff morale (not buying-in; participating in)
    - Organizational culture of change and improvement

  - Rapid delivery of services (timeliness improved)
  - Low QC error rates (accuracy improved)

Sharing Promising Practices

- FNS has encouraged states to share information about their practices, research and efforts to increase access among states via national and regional conferences.
- Statewide Food Stamp Modernization Conferences, jointly sponsored by CDSS, CWDA, and USDA, have been held in Sacramento, California in October 2008, April 2009, and July 2010. In February 2010, a Food Stamp Forum was also held in Sacramento (CWDA Food Stamps Website, 2010)
  - Most of the State and County models and recommendations found in this report were from resources shared at previous conferences, and can be found posted on the CWDA website here: http://www.cwda.org/tools/foodstamps.php

State Run Call Centers: Recommendations/Promising Practices

As California counties explore avenues for improving telephone-based benefit assistance, they can learn a great deal from the experiences of other states. Several states have developed comprehensive approaches to integrate access to benefits by increasing outreach efforts, bundling services, aligning program requirements, simplifying benefits, and using technology. In the next section, the experiences of other states are highlighted with special attention to lessons learned and promising practices of telephone-based food stamp assistance to draw from.

Overall State Themes: Lessons Learned
(Rowe, 2010)

- While States implemented several modernization initiatives it is key to remember modernization is a continuous process that happens over many years
- Organizational or business process changes often central, with technology and policy changes facilitating modernization
- Careful planning is essential
- Roll out the modernization incrementally
- Actively encourage buy-in from staff and stakeholders

Recommendations Based on Florida's Experience:*
(Winch, 2008; GAO, 2007)

1. Ensure that online applications have an electronic signature function. Without this, applicants still have to mail, fax, or come in person to complete the signature portion, defeating much of the purpose of the online application.
2. Require only documentation at recertification that is required under USDA regulations, and apply for waivers of USDA regulations that are barriers to a simplified application process.
3. Seek innovative ways to obtain documentation, such as through increasing the use of self-declarations and conducting computer matches that cross-reference with other state and federal programs.
4. Increase access points in the community with combined community partnership and DCF locations (Florida did by almost 1500%)

5. Create ways to move needed electronic data between computer systems (e.g. Data streaming; Tracking system; Online Management System)
6. Connie Mathers at the Policy Unit of the Department of Children and Families offered the following recommendations to other states looking into increasing telephone-based food stamp services:
   - Contact other states to share best practices;
   - Use a clear interview protocol or script to ensure accuracy and consistency;
   - Ensure adequate staff numbers to handle call volume;
   - Pay special attention to expedited cases to ensure timeliness
7. Provide more in-depth interviews for high-risk cases. In Florida, a case that is considered to have a greater potential for error or fraud is flagged as a "red track" case, and it receives an in-depth interview to more fully explore eligibility factors. (FNS officials commented that Florida uses an abbreviated interview with most households and that their in-depth interview for red track cases may be equivalent to the standard interview process used in other states) (GAO, 2007)

* Florida was the winner (out of 1,000 entrants) of the 2007 ASH Institute Innovations in American Government Award. Also received a high performance bonus check, $5,481,910, from USDA's Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services for improved accuracy rate of 95.85% in issuing food stamps for the FFY 2007.

** See "Web-based Eligibility/Online Application" Section of this report for more information on the online ACCESS Florida system. Changes to the system were based on suggestions from department case managers and customers, allowing new business practices to reflect the needs of the consumer.

Recommendations Based on Idaho's Experience:
(Kunz, 2010)
1. Focus on processes…processes drive improvements
2. Measure and respond to customer volume…have flexible staffing models to address daily volume of customer traffic. (focus staff on priority work; Measure performance by actions and completion of work…shift priorities accordingly
3. Create culture of change and continuous improvement
4. Technology becomes a partner in change not an answer to a problem

Recommendations Based on Massachusetts' Experience
(Winch, 2008; Marshall, 2010)
1. Implement policy and procedural changes that simplify that application process before increasing the use of telephone services.
2. Ensure that the technology being used has the capacity to handle increased usage before implementing a process that relies on it heavily. For example, ensure that telephone and voice mail systems are up to date and can store a large volume of messages before increasing telephone-based services.
3. Create "on-demand" call centers staffed by experienced eligibility workers where callers can receive immediate assistance, including telephone interviews, in many languages. Such call centers allow clients to have an interview at times convenient for them and relieves eligibility staff from the burden of tracking down clients over the phone.
4. Ensure that clients are asked the best time to call (and alternate contact phone numbers) in situations where eligibility personnel are calling clients.

5. Recognize cultural resistance and fear of errors that staff are experiencing during implementation stages, and place emphasis on customer service and participation rather than errors. (Marshall, 2010)

"We think there are MANY problems with phone based interviews—notably endless phone tag and voicemails, workers' lines being busy, worker voicemail being full, clients with limited phone call receipt options (like being at work or cell phones that limit incoming calls or don't have useful caller ID), clients with cell phone numbers that have area codes that the state agency phones read as long distance and thus prohibiting the call from going through, and on and on. At this juncture, ***Massachusetts advocates think the ONLY system that works best in a state with limited local offices is a statewide ""on-demand" call center where state food stamp workers are on a batter-up system at a toll free number and clients can call at any time during business hours to speak with a worker for their interviews. A phone interview system needs to move away from a specific caseworker assigned system for the initial application and interview.*** *We do not endorse a privatized model ala Florida or Texas. We know that in-person interviews simply do not work for food stamp clients who live too distantly from the food stamp office or have work or training conflicts or other time constraints or travel issues. However,* ***a successful phone interview model needs to operate with enough flexibility to ensure every food stamp applicant gets access to a food stamp intake worker without delay and who is trained and authorized to handle their application and immediate needs without additional referrals to specific staff."***

-Patricia Baker
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Personal Communication
February 5, 2007. (Winch, 2008)

Recommendations Based on New York's Experience
(Winch, 2008)

1. Simplify the recertification process by requiring only the documentation that is federally required in accordance with Federal Regulation 273.2(f)(8).
2. Create a standardized interview process to ensure for quick and complete interviews.
3. Prepare both workers and clients about the upcoming changes prior to implementation.

Lessons Learned Based on Texas' Experience
(GAO, 2007)

1. Texas state officials underestimated the level of expertise and training the contractor's call center agents needed.
   - For example, call center agents delayed the application process by sending applicants multiple requests for missing information, whereas a state caseworker would have known to use data-matching resources or other means to verify the information.
2. Texas experienced technology challenges because the state's new automated case management system, which was developed several years before the legislative mandate to develop call centers, had to be retrofitted to work within the call center model. The private contractor offered an interim technical solution which was determined to be ineffective.

Recommendations Based on Utah's Experience
(Winch, 2008; Ownby, 2010; Link)

1. Employ experienced eligibility staff who do not have caseloads at call centers.
2. Begin with a "soft-launch" (no advertising) to prevent a new system and newly trained workers from being overwhelmed.
3. Maintain low caseloads to contribute to better customer service.
4. Combine online applications with a digital signature, unscheduled telephone interviews at a call center, and a simple process for providing verifications to increase client flexibility in completing the application without entering a food stamp office.
5. Implement new systems gradually. In Utah, unscheduled interviews at regional call centers began as a pilot in a limited area with small numbers of people and have expanded to most offices in 12-18 months. Issues were identified early on and significant changes were made. Additionally, Utah made technological and procedural improvements in multiple stages, such as implementing a document imaging system for paper applications before launching online application.
6. Continue to explore process standards and improvements where possible to reduce the customer wait times.
7. Explore systems fixes where possible to reduce the number of dropped/abandoned calls and educate customers about what to do should their call be disconnected (e.g. way for customers to be routed back to the same worker if their call is disconnected causing the customer to have to possibly repeat information again)
    - Utah statistics indicate an average of 29,488 abandoned calls during the months November 2009 – March 2010. It should be noted that the average drop time is low at around 4:00 minutes.
8. Phones made available for customer use should provide them with some level of privacy while discussing personal and confidential information with eligibility.
9. Establish a review team gathered performance data and feedback from various sources within ESD to assess program performance and to identify any potential access or civil rights compliance issues.
    - In Utah, for the period July 1, 2009 through December 31, 2009 there were 486 complaints filed. Of those 486, 42 were related to accessibility issues with the top three being wait times, not sure of the correct numbers to call for interviews or unsure how to obtain case information.
10. Utah Application Process-Recommendations:
    - Gather data to show volume or issue type for the customers using the online help feature. The Eligibility Services Division (ESD) should record the number and type of issues received by the online help team in order to analyze trends and improve customer service.
    - ESD should consider having the Rights and Responsibilities print along with the confirmation page to provide the same level of information that a customer with a hard copy application receives (while the information can be viewed online, the team did not see evidence of this happening for those customers that were observed applying online).
    - Information regarding the eligibility timeframes for the interviews and processing could be better emphasized on the confirmation page from the online application. Additionally, the up-front staff should provide the same information to those applying in person.

  - Develop a consistent process at the One-Stop level for communicating to the customer the processing timeframes (including the wait time to call for an interview) for hard copy applications received in a One-Stop. Ensure members of the connection team are providing customers with the form 61EC as applicable with the pertinent eligibility processing information.

*Source for Recommendation #6-10 above is: (Ownby, 2010)

*Recommendations Based on Washington's Experience**
(Winch, 2008; Penn, 2009; Hutson & Roberts, 2010)

1. Develop Guiding Principles for the division (e.g. for Washington Economic Services Division: Provide customer-focused service; Empower and support staff; Build strategic partnerships; Demonstrate accountability; and Pursue innovation)
2. Implement IVR phone systems to allow clients 24/7 access to case information without increasing staff time.
3. Ensure that call center operators have access to a comprehensive and easy to use system of document management. Washington developed a document management system in house that other states have looked at as a model.
4. Integrate live call centers with IVR systems. Both systems will be more effective if linked.
   - Use the IVR system as a front end menu for call centers.
   - By having callers first enter their information into an IVR system that is passed onto systems used by call center operators, agents will have the caller's case information open when they answer the phone.
   - Integrating the IVR system with a staffed call center allows clients to manage their cases more completely. Not only could they listen to the status of their case, but they can also speak to a call center operator to update their file and even conduct recertification interviews. (Winch, 2008)
5. Invest in comprehensive data-matching software that automatically compares information provided by applicants and recipients with information contained in state databases. Using this software greatly reduces the burden on caseworkers, who would otherwise have to search multiple databases one at a time.
6. Ensure leadership commitment, starting at the top: make your commitment clear and commit the time, energy, resources, staffing, and budget necessary.
7. Identify who can make it happen – innovative solutions come from people who do the work. Actively engage staff at all levels via: re-engineering teams; communications; and providing alternate options for input
8. Apply strong project management and continuous improvements concepts:
   - Experienced project manager
   - Project charters, governance structure, plans, and timelines
   - Data for evaluation and measurement
9. Consider outside assistance and guidance
   - May get you there faster
   - Funding considerations
   - Build internal capacity/in-house experts
10. Involve your customers
11. Map your business processes, identify problems, and look for root causes
12. Build-in quality

13. Communicate, communicate, communicate
    - o Everyone's responsibility
    - o Local level most effective
14. Stay with it!
    - o Change management concepts – prepare the way
    - o Things "get in the way" – budget, staffing, other changes, outside influences – keep the goal in mind

* CSD uses its existing voice and data networks to connect its six regionalized call centers into the statewide virtual model. This enables clients to use a single, state-wide toll-free number. Refer to *Appendix E:* for the *Call Flow Configuration at Washington's Community Services Division-Call Center* . CSD operates a network of 43 community service offices (CSOs) and 14 branch offices throughout the State. The Division is organized into 6 regions and 62 local offices, and has approximately 2,800 staff. Staff use several enterprise mainframe computer systems to do their work. A wide range of service delivery configurations with varying degrees of specialization have resulted in a highly complex organizational structure.

**Source for Recommendation #6-14 above is: (Hutson & Roberts, 2010)

Arizona: Family Assistance Administration Communication Center-IT Innovation/ Recommendations
(Tunks & Martinez, 2009)

Comprehensive IT System includes:

- Document Imaging
  - o Can digitize documents into electronic files at origination point
  - o Can upload files to a virtual file room accessible from anywhere via the internet
    - ▪ Eliminates file room, reduce labor intensive file room activity: Filing, archiving, purging, transfers etc.
  - o Provides instant access to users, improved security and control
  - o Metrics as of March 09: Pages Online- 99,000,000; Users- 2,545
- Interactive Voice Response
  - o Inbound
    - ▪ 24/7 Self Service access for application status and other eligibility information or routes to agent by skill set
    - ▪ Easy Access to FAA, Child Support, Unemployment and Medicaid Administration
    - ▪ Provides program and office location information
    - ▪ Collect participant feedback through surveys
    - ▪ Super agent
  - o Outbound
    - ▪ 24/7 Outbound automated call capability
    - ▪ Remind participants of appointments
    - ▪ Offer new programs or portals
    - ▪ Proactive Improved Communication Campaigns
      - Sample – Appointment Reminder
- Phone System– Nortel Networks VOIP
  - o A telephone system and handsets that can work with an IVR
  - o Allows staff to login or logout
  - o Provides Web-based controls to create groups, assign users and skill sets
  - o Provides reports with metrics on many activities

  - Interacts with local desktop computers.
  - Provides options for monitoring and assisting simultaneously with calls
- Fax Server– Omtool Genifax 3.4
  - Server and software is capable of receiving faxes and then routing the electronic file.
  - Purpose:
    - Automation of fax receipt and routing process
    - Eliminates paper printing
    - Improves accountability and reduces lost or misplaced faxes
  - Functionalities:
    - Route based on business rules
    - Interacts with Email system
    - Interacts with Document imaging system
- Call Recording
  - Server and software records and stores calls
  - Purpose:
    - Quality/Performance measurements
    - Proves compliance to Contact Center rules
    - Assists in coaching and training
    - Used in calibration sessions to standardize performance and supervisory measurement
  - Functionalities:
    - Record based on business rules
    - Automatically tag interactions
    - Search calls

- *Preventing IT Issues* (Tunks & Martinez, 2009)
  - Good wiring and big bandwidth needed in your location.
  - Computers with large monitors or dual monitors
  - IT staff will need to learn handset troubleshooting
  - Repairs must be done quickly minutes count
  - Scanners have short warranties

California County Run Call Centers: Promising Practices

- At least 10 California counties currently have call centers, and many others are planning or considering implementation.
- *California's Official Statewide Protocol for Telephone-Based Food Stamp Assistance* is available here: http://www.myfoodstamps.org/pdf_files/PrescreeningProtocol.pdf).
- Below offers a brief sampling of a few of the California counties that have implemented successful out-of-office application practices (also refer to pages 11-14 and pages 30-31 for additional county tools/processes that have been found effective). In no way are the counties listed meant to be inclusive of all California County Call Center promising practices, as there are several others.
  - Most of the information for the below counties were pulled *directly* from presentation/resources developed and presented by County leads at previous CWDA Symposia. These can be found at the following webpage (and in the References page of this report): http://www.cwda.org/tools/foodstamps.php.

<u>ALAMEDA COUNTY</u>
(Shadix, 2010)
Food Stamp Enrollment, Oct. 2009: 93,821 individuals
Change in Enrollment from Oct. 2008: 11.4% increase

Call Center Operations
(Edwards, 2010)

- Twenty-four Call Center Specialists (Eligibility Support Clerks)
- Programs: CalWORKs, Medi-Cal, Food Stamps, General Assistance
    - General Information: office hours, location
    - Specific Information: case status, benefit amount, food stamp stagger day, BIC card, and verification letters issuances
- Client incoming calls and web inquiry now exceeds 100,000 monthly (2010)
    - 60% Handled by IVR
    - 25% Handled by Call Center
    - 15% Handled by Eligibility Worker
- Uses a secure server to receive/track applications and supporting documents electronically from partner organizations

County Before Document Imaging (Edwards, 2010)

- Case Requests took 3 to 10 Days
- 30,000 Square Feet of Hard Case Client Folders (In bins, work trays, under desks)
    - Included 83,302 cases (35 million pieces of paper; 200 boxes of unfiled documents)

Imaging Center Stats

- Monthly Average: 320,376; Documents: 609,628 Pages

Interactive Voice Response System (Edwards, 2010)

- Customer Automated Response System(CARS)
    - Medi-Cal
    - CalWORKs
    - Food Stamps
    - General Assistance
- Interactive WEB Response System

IVR: Adult & Aging Automated Response System (AAARS)
-Plus Web Component

- Implemented September 2006
- Handles on average 82 percent of all IHSS calls
- Offers general and specific information for both the client and the caregiver
- English, Spanish, Chinese

Foster Care Tracking System (FCTS) Functions for CFS:

- Automated tracking of child placement status
    - Runaways
    - Out-of-home

- Prevents overpayments to foster care providers via CalWIN interface (automated stop payment to a provider when a child changes placement)
- Automated way of informing the Child Welfare Worker the change placement notification has been received
- Accurate and on-time payments to foster care providers
- 24/7 Access for Foster Care Providers

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DPSS
(Shadix, 2010)

- Food Stamp Enrollment, Oct. 2009: 842,241 individuals
- Change in Enrollment from Oct. 2008: 22.3% increase

LA DPSS Customer Service Center
(Sylvester, 2009; Chavez, 2010)

- DPSS recognized the need for better access for customers
- DPSS implemented a call center (Customer Service Center pilot was implemented in Jan. 2007) that utilizes the state of the art technology to improve service access and delivery to their community. This was based on extensive research including:
  - Customer surveys
  - Caseloads and district traffic research
  - Work measurements & QC error rates
  - Public & Private Call Centers best practices
  - Business seminars & literature
  - Data & Telephone Systems
  - Major Industry Leaders – Cisco, EDS, Motorola, Unisys, Nexus and MaxTrac
  - Furniture and equipment vendors
  - Ergonomic workspace awareness
  - Plan for the future – growth and expansion
- The CSC is a "single point of contact" providing services for Medi-Cal, Food Stamps, CalWORKs and General Relief Services and is available in English, Spanish, Mandarin and Vietnamese
  - Answers questions, provides case information, and updates case records of participants.
  - Self-Service Interactive Voice Response System (IVR) implemented in 2008.
    - Clients have access to their case records 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. This automated system provides clients with case-specific information such as: case status, benefit amount, QR7/MSR status, and other general information without the need to speak to a live Customer Service Representative.
    - Recently, the participants have been provided the ability to customize and choose their own pin.
  - Also began a pilot in June 2010, that is an extension of the CSC-an On-Line Interactive Voice Response, where clients can apply for benefits, schedule appointments, etc (Chavez, 2010).
    - Available here: www.DPSSBenefits.lacounty.gov

        - More information on LA's online IVR is available here: http://www.cwda.org/downloads/tools/foodstamps/LA-LEADER-Web-presentation.pps
- Experienced eligibility staff were selected for CSC based on customer service skills and experience
    - eligibility staff received comprehensive customer service and computer system training
- Uses advanced technology for tracking, reporting and analysis
    - CSC uses Cisco's Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology for telephone using IPCC and ICM Products. Important features include:
        - Automated Call Distribution (ACD)
        - Interactive Voice Response (IVR)
        - Text to Speech (TTS)
        - Automated Speech Recognition (ASR)
        - Skill Based Routing
        - Enhanced Computer Telephony Integration (CTI)
        - Enhanced Call Reporting

Recommendations from LA DPSS regarding Call Center development

- Research, research, research
- Get a consultant
- Plan the entire scope of the project
- Plan for the future – Growth and Expansion
- Include all partners
- Community Agencies and Advocacy Groups
- Employee Unions/Bargaining Groups
- Plan to work closely, hand-in-hand with the vendors
- Plan for friendly maintenance & upgrades
- Professional training and certificate programs for Customer Service Representatives
- Plan staffing based on call centers

LA DPSS Identified Benefits:

- Customer Benefits
    - Single point of contact
    - Timely and accurate responses
    - Calls are tracked and handled appropriately
    - Priority handling of emergencies
    - Greater accountability for case actions
    - Accurate and uniform information through the use of knowledge-based technology
    - Expanded access to resource information
    - Automated program and resource information
    - Redeploy resources quickly during a disaster
    - Customer surveys have proven a 99% customer satisfaction

- Organizational Benefits
  - Immediate access to case information via DPSS' eligibility and benefits issuance system, LEADER
  - Centralizes information sources to ensure accuracy
  - Immediate access to current program information through the knowledge based system
  - Provides an escalating system of alerts for tracking case actions done via a customer relationship management solution known as Frontlink
  - Ensures Accountability and Quality Control
  - Enhance management control through real time reporting
  - Reduced district office traffic
  - Reduced customer complaints

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY
(Shadix, 2010; O'Farrell, 2010).

- Food Stamp Enrollment, Oct. 2009: 39,769 individuals
- Change in Enrollment from Oct 2008: 22.7% increase

Prior to Oct. 2008

- Workers each had own caseload, large filing cabinets and lots of paper
- Clerks constantly moving paper files
- Work built-up when staff sick or vacation
- Customers report that 55% of calls went straight to voicemail, and it typically took 2-3 days for a return call

Case Bank Model

- All paper case-files are centralized, imaged
- Workers are assigned tasks using the Task Management Tracking system (TMT)
- Tasks are assigned by language, but not necessarily to workers who have previously worked the case
- Initially, workers protested new model with a picket-line
- Leadership emphasized the benefits of Case-Bank Model
  - Amount of work done by workers can be quantified
  - Supervisors can see the work done by workers per day, week, month. They can identify training needs and give staff informed feedback.
  - No delay in service to customers when a worker is unavailable
  - Informal quality assurance

Call Center

- An automated call distribution system routes calls by language, and by new applicant versus existing case
- ACD Analyst: Documents and analyzes routing of calls; Identifies: When wait-time is too long, Who is on phone when, etc; Produces dashboards
- Operated by eligibility staff who work for half of the day as call center operators and half of the day completing tasks in other areas of the office (assigned phone shifts)
- Phones answered from 8am-5pm a day, with no lunch breaks.

- When language staff is not available, a third-party translator is used.
- Originally 5k calls coming in per month, now 7.5k calls
    - Number of applicants and caseload has skyrocketed, with decreasing staff
    - Yet Call Center customer service indicators have not gone down

Better Customer Service/Better Morale

- Customers now only wait an average of 30 seconds before their call is answered.
- They never have to leave messages.
- They can call anytime 8am-5pm
- Staff pride in effective customer service, short wait-tim

Future Opportunities for Increased Efficiency

- Elimination of additional paperwork/signature requirements-
- Reduce mailing back-and-forth with customers
- Reduce worker preference for face-to-face
- Integrate with technology on backend
- Integration of bSF scanned docs into Imagingsystem
- Integration of bSF into CalWIN (avoid double-entry)

ADDITONAL CALIFORNIA COUNTY-RECOMMENDATIONS

- Set the timer for the call center to stop accepting calls a half an hour before your office closes to ensure all clients that get into the queue are being addressed before the office closes. (Fresno County-Story, 2010)
- Document the types of calls coming into the Call Center and the kinds of issues clients are facing to identify and respond to specific trends. (Fresno County-Story, 2010)
- It is hard to address immediate needs and expedited time frames with both phone and web applications. Web applications tend to be more incomplete, then if it was completed in paper face-to-face. It is hard to get a hold of an online applicant via phone, when you have questions and we currently do not interact we clientele via email as of the potential legal obstacles/challenges it creates, although this is worth looking into. (Tulare County-Blackmon, 2010)

Web-based Eligibility/Online Applications:
(Boots, 2010)

Agencies are increasingly undertaking more innovative efforts to reach potential clients. One such effort is to take advantage of online technology to improve benefit screening, supply calculators for rough estimates of potential benefits, offer more convenient application and recertification procedures, and provide applications that allow families to apply for multiple benefits and recertification.

All states post information about benefits on the Internet, at least in a downloadable paper file (response to the 2002 Farm Bill) and most have program applications that can be printed out and submitted via regular mail or in person.

- In 26 states, food stamps/SNAP applications can be submitted via the Internet through online application forms (http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/apply.htm).

    - At least 17 states have integrated online applications that provide access to multiple programs within the state. Some of these include access to multiple benefits and electronic-signature capabilities. They also allow applicants to upload and send documents, which reduces or eliminates the need for a face-to-face meeting, and allow users to track the status of their applications. Systems like COMPASS in Pennsylvania are leading the way in creating a more seamless benefits access system.
- Other states have gone further by creating single application forms, unified renewal policies, and "express-lane" eligibility (for SCHIP, for example) that presume eligibility based on data provided for other programs.
- Early leaders in providing online applications include: Pennsylvania, Washington, Georgia, and California.
    - Clients can apply online for Food Stamps, CalWORKs, and Medi-Cal using benefits in most California counties right now.
        - *C4Yourself Counties:* Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Humboldt, Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Lake, Lassen, Madera, Marin, Mariposa, Mendocino, Merced, Modoc, Mono, Monterey, Napa, Nevada, Plumas, San Joaquin, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Stanislaus, Sutter, Riverside, San Benito, San Bernardino, Tehama, Trinity, Tuolumne and Yuba (www.c4yourself.com/c4yourself)
        - *CalWIN Counties:* Alameda, Contra Costa, Fresno, Orange, Placer, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco*, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma, Tulare, Ventura, and Yolo (www.benefitscalwin.org)
        - *BenefitsSF*: San Francisco* (www.benefitssf.org)

        *Note: San Francisco is transferring to the CalWIN system as of 12/09/10.

The extent to which clients use online applications depends in part on state outreach and marketing efforts that promote electronic tools. For example, because of staff reductions Florida has moved to an almost completely electronic system for applying and renewing benefits. Even when applying at local offices, clients are encouraged to use the online system and are sent notices that list Web addresses to renew benefits.

Benefits of Online Services

- In Pennsylvania, more than 90 percent of the benefit applications coming through the COMPASS system are from individuals, not from trained application assisters, and 84 percent of the applications received each month are completed in a home. Moreover, about half are submitted outside of regular business hours, demonstrating that online tools available directly to clients can serve a valuable role in expanding access to government services. (Hoover & Koerner, 2006; Parrott, Ross, & Schott, 2005)
- Other substantial benefits of offering online services are that information can be presented to families on additional services they might be eligible to receive and information can be presented in multiple languages. (Hoffman, 2006; Hoover & Koerner, 2006)

- Public benefits customers have a positive view of online applications, according to survey results in a number of states. An initial study of a California pilot of a joint Medicaid/SCHIP online program found that 90 percent of applicants would prefer to apply online. (Wysen, 2003)
- Online systems have shown that they can cut an agency's response time on a benefit application, ensuring that supports are delivered quickly. The California pilot for Medicaid and SCHIP again showed that the online system processed applications 13 percent to 18 percent more quickly than did the previous paper-based system, thus decreasing the time before benefits are received. (Ange, Chimento, Park, & Wilk, 2008)

Considerations when Developing Online Benefit Services
(Schott & Parrott, 2005)

- Among the many different policy and program considerations to take into account when designing an online application are the following:
  - How many programs will the application cover?
  - Who will be the intended user (i.e., either families, caseworkers, or both)?
  - Can families apply online for benefits directly or must they use a community-based organization or intermediary?
  - What are the verification requirements?
  - How will applications be processed once they are received online?
  - Can clients submit an online application with an electronic signature or must they submit a paper copy of their signature?

Online Program Applications – Technical Issues
(Schott & Parrott, 2005)

- A number of technical issues should be considered when developing online applications for programs, including:
  - ensuring Internet security;
  - facilitating information sharing between multiple departments;
  - permitting clients to update or change existing information without creating duplicate applications;
  - developing online applications and Web sites that can be accessed by clients who have slower Internet connections;
  - creating applications compatible with a variety of Internet browsers; and
  - providing online help and toll-free numbers for clients who have questions when applying for benefits.

Online Services: Promising Practices

- <u>Model Programs</u>: these practices have also been adopted by other states, such as West Virginia and New Jersey, and customized for each state's specific needs (Boots, 2010).
  - *Oregon Helps*: A five-time winner of local, national, and international technology awards, the Oregon Helps Web site provides a screening tool in several different languages for 28 programs in the areas of food and nutrition, health care, housing, children and family resources, financial benefits, and Veterans services. By answering a few questions at the beginning of the screening tool, the Web site directs individuals to more specific questions

depending on age, disability, household composition, and county of residence. The product of an extensive collaboration between several government agencies, non-profit organizations, and a private consultant, Oregon Helps keeps tool maintenance costs to under $10,000 per year by utilizing non-proprietary computer programming languages. (Boots, 2010)

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- *COMPASS*: One of the best known efforts to offer access to benefits in an integrated, electronic format is Pennsylvania's COMPASS program. Launched in 2001, COMPASS offers an online screening and application program for healthcare programs, TANF cash assistance, food stamps, energy assistance, and community and home-based services. The program provides customers the ability to screen, apply, renew, and check benefits and the status of their application. (Boots, 2010)
  - A network of community partners can assist clients who are applying for benefits through the COMPASS system, offering a critical service to enhance outreach efforts to low-income families. Tools that facilitate a simplified process for customers include lists of the verification documents required for each program, e-signed applications and renewals for clients to continue receiving benefits, and a generic health care application that is routed to the appropriate department to determine whether the client or family member could be eligible for Medicaid or other health services. (Boots, 2010)
  - Future enhancements to COMPASS include adding programs provided through the Pennsylvania Departments of Health and Aging, scanning verification documents, offering online applications for the national school lunch program, and providing automated program renewals in which packets will be generated and mailed to clients. (Boots, 2010)

- *ACCESS Florida*: The enhanced Web application, an integral component of ACCESS Florida, allows clients to apply for benefits online through electronic signatures and has rapidly grown in use. As of June 2006, over 85 percent of the state's applications for benefits were received electronically. For more information on the program, please contact Jennifer Lange, director of ACCESS Florida, at (850) 921-0253. (Hoffman, 2006)

- *benefitsSF.org (San Francisco County)*:* (O'Farrell, 2010)

  - Offers a self-service website with additional functionality capabilities:
    - Integrated screener (one screen for many benefits)
    - Accurate prediction of eligibility for each benefit, FS range
    - Screener auto populates data into applications to eliminate re-keying
    - Scan verification docs and electronically attach to applications
    - Electronic delivery of applications and supporting documentation to administrating agencies
    - Save and print applications

- Track applications by demographics– (CBO, language, zip, etc)
- Internal user interface to review and process applications
- Support three languages – English, Spanish and Chinese
- Web camera for instant face-to-face Food Stamp interviews
    - Also provides new computers and webcams to partner organizations using benefitsSF to allow them to arrange webcam eligibility interviews for clients.

*Note: San Francisco is transferring to the CalWIN system as of 12/09/10.

- User-Friendly Applications: By making applications as user-friendly as possible, families are more likely to apply for benefits and understand program requirements. The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services offers an online user test to obtain feedback on how easy it is to understand benefit applications such as the Expedited Food Assistance program. States can use this type of customer feedback to make important modifications to applications to improve the quality of services. Offering applications in several languages can be another key factor in assisting low-income families. California provides Medicaid program applications in 11 different languages. (Boots, 2010)
    - Florida ACCESS Web Applications-Improvements
        - Case summaries
        - Progress bar
        - Navigation menu
        - Evaluates expedited services
            - Prioritizes application in queue by: Expedited; Unknown; No; Blank (not a food stamp application)
        - System displays summary (so applicant can review and edit)
        - Client Registration /Clearance Process
            - Displays new information from client and that already in base system
            - Allows for edit to base system
            - Provides 1 button touch clearance process
        - Confirmation Page-Email serves as a receipt for the customer.

- Combined Applications: Another promising way states can improve families' access to services and reduce paperwork for caseworkers is to combine applications for two or more benefit programs into a single form. With combined applications, families spend less time filling out applications and do not have to make as many required office visits. (Boots, 2010)
    - Creating an application for multiple programs involves the work of various state agencies to develop common questions, devise methods to share information, and develop compatible information technology systems. States should be careful not to make multiple program applications too lengthy by identifying the questions that can screen for several different programs and eliminating questions not necessary for determining eligibility. (Boots, 2010)

    - The more programs included in an online screening tool, the more time-consuming the screening process is likely to be for clients. States will want to strike a balance between screening for the broadest array of programs as possible, while minimizing the complexity of the tool. Some states have designed screening and benefit tools so answers to specific questions trigger a subset of questions for more targeted programs, such as those intended to assist individuals with disabilities. This approach reduces the number of questions individuals must answer unless they meet basic program requirements. Screening tools also can determine whether other individuals in a person's household might be eligible for benefits. (Boots, 2010)

- Electronic Signatures: Some states use electronic signatures to validate the identity of online users of their systems. For example, Florida's on-line application asks applicants to click a button signifying that they are signing the application. (GAO, 2007)
    - Online applications without electronic signature capability have limited benefit because households are required to also submit an actual signature through mail, fax, or in person after completing the online application.
        - Texas state officials and community partner representatives report that the lack of this capability limited its use and benefit to households.
        - By contrast, Florida's application has electronic signature capability and Florida officials reported that, as of December 2006, about 93 percent of their applications are submitted on-line. (GAO, 2007)
        - California Digital Signature Regulations (Government Code 16.5): http://www.sos.ca.gov/digsig/code165.htm

- Food Stamp Pre-Screening Tools: Simply using the income guidelines to determine if a family in California may be eligible for the Food Stamp Program is not the most accurate method. For this reason, most outreach programs throughout the state of California use a prescreening tool. However, any organization that chooses to prescreen should follow the California prescreening protocol. For more about prescreening for food stamps or to download prescreening tools, go to http://www.myfoodstamps.org/screeningtool.html and http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Documents/NetowrkFSO-ToolkitBasics.pdf

California State Policies/Developments:

- Inter-County Transfer
    - Currently, California State regulations do not allow clients to transfer their food stamp case from one county to another without completing a new application. Counties are taking the lead to sponsor state legislation to fix this, and automation changes are ready to go once state authority is provided. (CWDA Food Stamps Webiste, 2010)

- Face-to-Face (F2F) Interview Waivers
    - In 2009, CDSS requested and received approval of a federal waiver allowing county welfare departments the option of waiving the face-to-face interview for all food stamp recipients.

    - The interview can instead by conducted by telephone and the fingerprint imaging requirement can be postponed for up to a year.
    - CDSS issued county implementing instructions in October 2009.
    - The waiver is effective as of June 1, 2009 through May 31, 2013. (http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/entres/pdf/PressRelease/FoodStampProgramOutreachEfforts.pdf)
  - The most current CDSS Food Stamp Program Operations and Access Reports, reflects FY 2008-2009 and documents that during that year in California:
    - Forty-six counties (81.9 percent of statewide FSP households) used eligibility workers to conduct the face-to-face waiver screenings. Standardized questions were used by seven of the eight counties that engaged clerical staff to conduct this process
    - Fifty-two counties (98.0 percent of statewide FSP households) waived face-to-face interviews for clients who were eligible for such waiver. Of these 52 counties, 26 waived 1 to 5 percent of all face-to-face interviews for eligible households. Twelve counties waived over 20 percent of their face-to-face interviews, a 100 percent increase over FY 07-08.
    - Hardship, utilized by 31 counties, was the most common type of waiver.
    - When asked to identify the top three reasons face-to-face interviews were waived, counties cited lack of transportation, physically disabled household members with no earned income, and household members age 60 or older with no earned income.
    - Telephone interviews were the primary replacement method, used by 48 counties, in lieu of face-to-face interviews.
      (CDSS, Data Systems and Survey Design Bureau Administration Division, 2009)
  - Following the implementation of the Waivers, Stanislaus County, immediately documented the following benefits:
    - Decreased volume of associated activity in their lobbies
    - Reduced number of "Reschedules"
    - Removal of many barriers that previously prevented customers from attending their recertification appointments.
    - Increased customer satisfaction over not having to arrange for transportation and/or childcare to complete a face-to-face interview
    - Enhanced C4 Yourself Application process, allowing customers to apply and be interviewed in the privacy of their own homes. (Williams, 2010)

- Telephonic Signatures
  (Winch, 2008; Rosenbaum, 2008)
  - Beyond telephone interviews, accessing over the phone case status information, and telephone recertifications, as of October 2008 states have an option of using telephonic signatures to complete entire food stamp applications over the phone.
    - There are multiple forms of telephonic signatures. Some of these include: using Personal Identification Numbers (PINs), entering personal identifying information, using voice recordings, and using voice recognition technology (for advantages and disadvantages of each

possibility see pages 24-26 of *Untangling the Lines Using Phone-Based Assistance to Increase Access to Food Stamps*, here: http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Documents/Network-PPP-FSO-UntanglingLines.pdf).

- Analysis: Finger imaging for Food Stamps
    - In July 2010 California Association of Food Banks (CAFB) released *Finger Imaging: Pointing California in the Wrong Direction,* a comprehensive look at the use of finger imaging for food stamps. CAFB found that the use of finger imaging in California has been ineffective at reducing fraud, wastes scarce tax dollars, and reduces program participation. Full report is available here: http://www.cafoodbanks.org/docs/Finger%20Imaging%20Report.pdf

- Additional California Policy Developments
    - The following website: http://www.foodstampguide.org/recent-policy-changes-in-the-works/ is updated with policy developments affecting the content of the *California Guide to the Food Stamp Program.*

Marketing/Outreach

Most states and counties recommend beginning with a "soft-launch" (no marketing) to fix bugs/errors as well as prevent the new call-center or online system and the newly trained workers from being overwhelmed with applicants. However, in recent years many have begun to take a variety of actions to increase awareness/advertise the new methods to help households access benefits via the phone and online. Some of these actions include:

- Informational CD-ROMs/DVDs
- Sending informational mailings
- Providing frequently-asked questions handouts and webpages
- Holding community meetings
- Providing multiple pathways on Web
- Employing call center staff who speak languages other than English
- Relying on partnerships with Food Banks and other CBO's, to help households use alternative methods.
    - For example, four of the five states GAO (2007) interviewed provide grants to community-based organizations to inform households about the program and help them complete the application process.
        - Florida actually closed a third of its local assistance offices and developed a network of community partners across the state to help households access food stamps. Florida state officials said that 86 percent of the community partners offer at least telephone and on-line access for completing and submitting food stamp applications (GAO, 2007)
    - Building the capacity of CBOs and other groups that work directly with low-income clients is a critical task, even after new systems are built and policy barriers removed. That includes providing technical assistance and resources for service providers to help their clients gain access to benefits more efficiently. (Winch, 2008)

Call-Centers: Implementation and Maintenance Costs

Below are three examples of associated development and implementations costs for two States and one California county who have implemented Call-Centers.

1. *State of Arizona Family Assistance Administration Communication Center* (Tunks & Martinez, 2009)

- Implementation Costs/Financing
  - Document Imaging – 3 Year Project
    - Pilot Office: $ 33,851
    - Paid by holding 3.8 Fte Vacant
      - Used this process for 26 Offices
    - Last 59 Offices: $2.2 Million
      - Department Enterprise Funding Request
    - Staff time savings to date: $4.2 Million
  - IVR Project Inbound – 22 Week Project
    - Hardware and Software: $323,000
    - Paid by consolidating offices
    - Super Agent Savings estimate – 1.8 million minutes in 08.
  - IVR Project Outbound – 19 Week
    - Development Cost: $94,100
  - Communication Center – 10 Week Project
    - Hardware, Software and Installation: $684,000
      - Telephone System
      - Wiring, Network Equipment
      - Fax Server
    - Paid by Consolidating Offices and Annual Efficiency Savings - $909,000

2. *Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Community Services Division- Call Center* (Penn, 2009)

- Call Center Specific Costs:
  - Agent Connections (IP Agent)/Month:
    - $360,000/annual maintenance
  - Network Costs/Month (for additional T1 circuits)
    - $420,000/annual maintenance
    - $43,200 development costs
  - IVR applications (zip code router, screen pop, answer phone)
    - $540,000/annual maintenance
    - $700,000 development costs
- Supporting Business Applications:
  - Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES): Supports multiple divisions within DSHS
    - $ 6 million/year

  - Barcode (an in-house server-based application with multiple sub-systems and interfaces with ACES, SSPS, JAS & CAMIS)
    - $4.4 million/year
- Document Management System (DMS)
  - DMS is a sub-system of Barcode and costs approximately:
    - $400K per year to operate
    - $1.6 million to implement
  - Annual savings (calculated by subtracting operational DMS costs from net staff savings) is approximately $5.5 million per year

3. *San Mateo County Human Services Agency: Health Insurance and Food Stamps Tele-Center* (Kiryczun, 2009)

- Implementation Costs
  - Start up: $1,850,000
  - Estimated avoidance: $22,348,000 (FY 08/09)
  - Actual avoidance: $5,056,296 (FY 08/09)
    - Primarily due to salaries and benefits
    - Off-set by Automation costs

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Appendix A: SNAP Offices -The Case for Process Management (Shaw, 2009)

focus

By Blake Shaw

Blake Shaw is senior partner with the Change and Innovation Agency, which helps government agencies improve performance.

The Case for Process Management

What we found in New Mexico was that process management allowed us to serve increased numbers of clients without increased stress for our staff.

—KATIE FALLS, ACTING SECRETARY, NEW MEXICO HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

These last two years have tested the capacity of our SNAP offices nationwide. Systems across the country are facing crushing increases in caseloads, diminishing timeliness, operational inconsistencies, poor quality, revolving doors for staff, unhappy customers and costly errors.

We used to be able to meet increased demands by leaning heavier on the staff, pushing their caseloads and their stress levels beyond capacity. We have filled their glasses full. And now? We are trying to pour 40 percent more water into already full glasses. The results? Employees are leaving, customers are falling through the cracks, and time to get benefits and error rates is increasing. The obvious option is to add more staff; but in this budget climate, it isn't feasible. The only two options are to reduce the amount of water coming in or to increase the capacity of the glass. This article will show you how to do both by moving from a case management model to process management.

Standing in the lobby of most SNAP offices is like standing in flood waters. From opening to closing time, it's a constant stream of people needing help. How can we possibly serve all these people? We can't, and the good news is we don't have to.

Our research consistently shows that 70–80 percent of the people in line simply shouldn't be there at all. Fewer than 3 out of 10 visitors are there to apply for benefits, yet all 10 are being poured into the already overflowing case manager glasses. Why is everyone else there?

1. Because we take too long. More than 40 percent of the visitors to the office are there to ask "where's my stuff?" I dropped it off, did you get it? I can't get my caseworker to answer my calls, so can I speak with him/her? Why did I lose service? What does this letter mean?" And I'm here because I don't trust that you will receive it through the drop box or through the mail.
2. Because we couldn't get it done on the first try. Seven out of 10 customers typically can't complete the application on the first try and have to interact with us again—clogging the lobby, the phone lines and the mailboxes.
3. Because we were late renewing customers. Renewing a customer for the SNAP program is much easier than an initial application process. However, miss the renewal and applicants have to go through the arduous process all over again, or take critical staff time to reinstate them outside of the normal process. In many of the offices we have worked with, more than half of the customers are not renewed on time. A majority of those (70–80 percent) will be back in the office in less than three months to start a new application. The extra work caused by missed renewals accounted for 56 full-time-staff equivalents in one state alone.

What do these numbers tell us? Our pain is self-inflicted. Most of the work flooding our offices is because of our own processes, policies and constraints. And the biggest constraint we face is our business model—case management.

Increasing Our Capacity

So how did it get this way? Many try to blame the customers. "If they would only keep their appointments, or remember to bring in their documents." Many try to lay the blame on the staff. "They need to work harder or smarter and stay on top of their cases." The reality is, it's not the fault of the customers or the staff. They are both victims of the business system—one that has served us so well for so long but can no longer meet the demand—case management.

Most human service delivery models are based on case management wherein a caseworker shepherds customers through all the steps necessary to receive their benefits. There is almost a romantic notion that the personal touch involved with case management comforts our customers and that staff ownership of cases breeds accountability.

The truth is that case management has some wonderful qualities that have served our industry well, so long as we have manageable caseloads, experienced staff and reliable technology. But do your public assistance offices have all three? More likely you have a backlog of cases, high turnover and legacy systems. The desire to serve the client is there, but when just one criterion fails to measure up, we lose the foundation on which case management was built.

The results of a wobbly foundation are devastating to clients and staff. There is a limited amount of increased productivity you can squeeze out of caseworkers by trying to manage and provide incentives for them to work harder when their glasses are full. So what can we do? It's time to shift the burden. To stop hoping for creative incentives, to stop burning out super workers and start designing, managing and supporting super systems, it's time to move from case management to process management.

In case management, the success of the client depends heavily on the clients' ability to meet all requirements in a timely fashion. It depends upon the size of the caseload and the competency of the caseworker, as well as the ability of other applicants to get their ducks in a row.

Embarking on an effort to reengineer our business practices presents an exceptional opportunity to take a comprehensive look at every aspect of our business, analyze the data and make the kinds of changes that will transform the way we have traditionally delivered services in Washington state. The anticipated return on investment for families and the agency is significant. Washington is fortunate to have the technology we do, but technology itself is not mandatory to make drastic business changes and improvement.

—LEO RIBAS, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES, WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES

Clients with all their documentation and correct applications can only get their benefits quickly if their caseworker has the time. The caseworker only has time if their calendar permits and they are running on schedule. The schedule is only on time if the last client had all the documentation and application correct—which is rarely the case—and if their co-workers all showed up today, shielding them from having to cover extra intakes.

More realistically, the two hours it should take to do the value-added work steps to get benefits is stretched over a month as we juggle pending requirements, maxed-out caseloads and chaotic appointments.

In process management, the success of the client depends on a team of people working on key processes to move the case along as quickly as possible. A public assistance case consists of intake, verification, eligibility determination, and recertification and reporting and changes throughout.

The output of each process becomes the input of the next process, allowing a smooth flow to completion. Interviews completed at intake that need additional verifications are immediately given to the verification process team while those ready to go to eligibility are directed there. The verification team works with clients to build a complete file so the eligibility team can immediately make a decision. It's a fluid process that follows the natural walk of a client through our systems and allows teams to specialize their work.

Benefits of Process Management

It's faster. By splitting the work into logical processes, New Mexico offices that have implemented process management are typically distributing benefits in fewer than seven days vs. 30 days with case management. They are not alone in seeing the more than 80 percent improvement in processing time as well as a dramatic reduction in errors and rework.

It's flexible. With case management, we often deal with peak volumes by forcing overtime. With process management, staff can be moved from process to process, depending where the peaks occur. Offices that have implemented process management are able to mix and match staff daily, even hourly to meet a fluid workload. Increased interview traffic can be dealt with by moving staff from the verification or recertification process.

It's responsive. Case management hinges on the availability of the caseworker to answer questions and conduct interviews. With process management, interviews are conducted immediately and questions about a case can be answered by any number of people. Customers may not have the comfort of a single contact, but they can be comforted with timely answers to their issues.

It's accurate. Case management relies on one caseworker's accurate application of the complex rules and policies. It also allows 50 caseworkers to document and note their cases in 50 different ways. Process management involves standardized processes. With up to four different sets of eyes involved at different times, offices that have implemented process management have seen a 50 percent reduction in error rates.

It's accountable. Process management offices have the ability to know minute by minute how many clients are being served, their wait time, error rates, and if the customers were happy. If they don't like the results, they have a good idea of where improvements to the process need to be made.

It's efficient. Process management has allowed offices to absorb an average caseload increase of 30 percent with faster processing time and fewer errors without additional resources. In addition, dedicated recertification teams have virtually eliminated the 50 percent rework we noted earlier.

It's rewarding. Case management is akin to being a teacher with a class size of 700. The management of the processes allows caseworkers to do what they do best—work with customers. Staff on the interview team get to focus on interviewing customers without worrying about whether the 100 other customers they are tracking this month got their paperwork in on time. You spend so much time managing the size of the class that you don't get to do what you truly love—to teach. Process management allows workers to do what they do best.

It's not technology-driven. Being a huge fan of technology and innovations like document imaging, it is hard to write that technology is not the answer. It's vastly more important that we develop good business processes than automate something that just isn't working for today's demands. I've seen faster, better performance from lo-tech agencies with sound business processes. For example, there are lo-tech offices providing benefits before hi-tech offices even set up an appointment for an online application. There are lo-tech offices working and processing verifications while verifications are still being shipped to the document imaging hub in other states. Fix the business processes first, and then enhance with technology.

Appendix B: Commonwealth of Massachusetts Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Helpful hints for Telephone Interviews (Marshall, 2010)

Helpful Hints for Telephone Interviews

Preparation

- Prepare as much as possible for phone interview prior to contact.
- Find previous case record, if any.
- Access BEACON to read narrative and summary tabs to see if previous history or information has any effect on current eligibility. (e.g., external matches, program violations, sanctions).
- Get appropriate screen prints from other systems (i.e. Bendex, SDX, View Direct, SAVE) and review information submitted by client so that discrepancies can be discussed.
- Enter as much information as possible from the application into BEACON.
- Make note of unanswered questions that need clarification.
- Have the SNAP Application Summary Checklist with you to act as a guide.

Introduction

- Introduce yourself by using your title and name of your office.
- Verify that it is the applicant to whom you are speaking.
- Establish if it's a convenient time for you to speak with the applicant.
    - If inconvenient, set up a convenient date and time allowing for both the client and yourself to review and complete the interview.
- Explain to applicant the purpose of the call is to:
    - Acknowledge their request for assistance.
    - Clarify their answers on application.
    - Answer questions they have regarding application process.
    - Complete the application.
- A smile in your voice can help make the telephone interview proceed more smoothly! Use calm, patient tone if the applicant's voice seems anxious.

Interview

- Ask for clarification if you do not understand what client is trying to say.
- Ask open-ended questions and avoid leading questions. Do not ask, "Has your rent changed?" Instead say, "How much is your rent?"
- Keep the applicant focused by anticipating and blocking interruptions.
- Restate what caller has said to make sure the information you are hearing is correct.
- Offer any useful information that you feel is relevant to the telephone interview.
- If telephone interview requires an additional follow-up call, ask when is the best time to reach the applicant.

Summary

- Make sure that if an applicant has questions you will give them an answer.
- Schedule a follow up contact call if needed.
- Summarize steps or follow up verifications that are necessary. Explain alternate verifications that are acceptable.
- Be clear on appropriate time frames, such as when verifications are due
- Provide your telephone number and best time to reach you.
- Tell the client that you will assist if they have difficulty obtaining verifications.
- Thank the client for their time and reassure them that you will do your best to help them.

http://www.cfpa.net/PhoneInterviewsCalifornia/PhoneInterviewHints_Mass_2009.doc

Appendix C: Fresno County DSS Change Center: Review Sheet for Live Call Monitor (Story, 2010)

EW being reviewed: Agent Number:

Date: Time:

Intro: Y N

Case Number:

Identified by:

Address and phone number verified and updated?

Reason for call:

Was agent response correct?

Was agent clear, courteous, professional?

Did agent make changes or case notes on the electronic case file?

If the customer was placed on hold, how long was the hold time?

Comments:

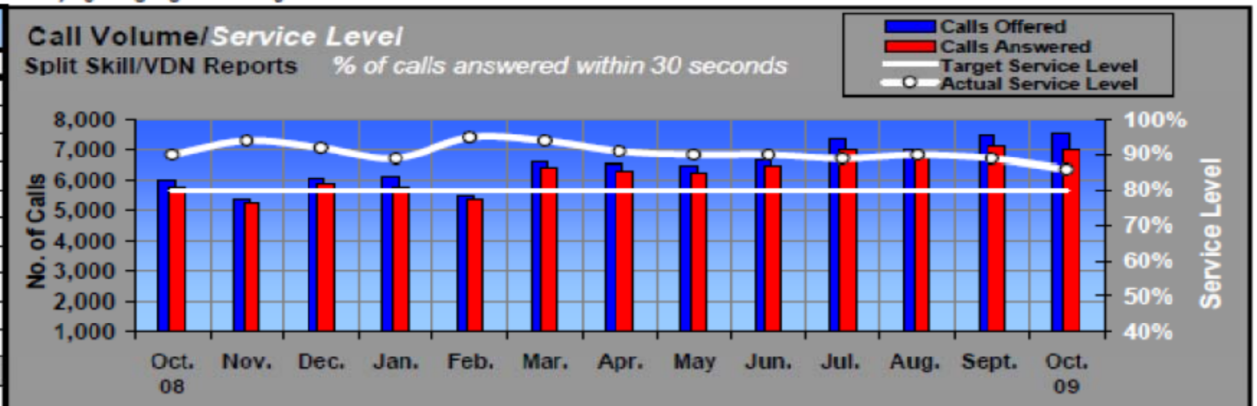
Appendix D: San Francisco County Food Assistance Service Center: Monthly Dashboard Report (O'Farrell, 2010)

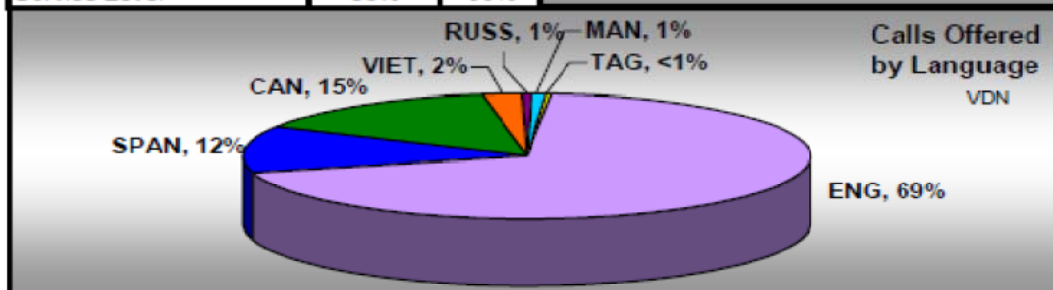
food assistance 558-1001

CITY & COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO FOOD ASSISTANCE SERVICE CENTER
ACD/TMT MONTHLY DASHBOARD REPORT – CARRYING
OCTOBER 2009

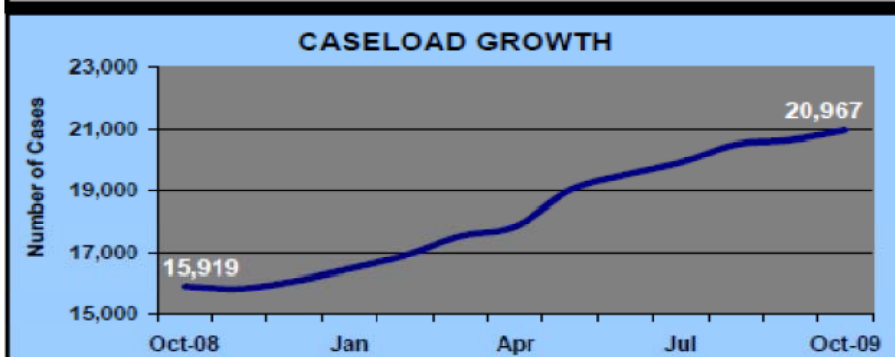
*Carrying Language Line usage are estimates from actual data
*Carrying Language Line usage are estimates from actual data

OCTOBER '09	Actual	Target
Avg. TEWs per Day	37	52
Calls Offered	7,538	–
Calls Answered	7,020	–
Calls Abandoned	518	–
% Abandoned	7%	<5%
Avg Speed of Answer	0:26	≤0:30
Avg Client Abandon Time	2:30	–
Avg Talk Time	3:11	–
Avg After Call Work Time	1:07	≤3:00
RONA Calls	107	0
%RONA	1.42%	0%
Language Line Transfers*	0.63%	<10%
Service Level	86%	80%

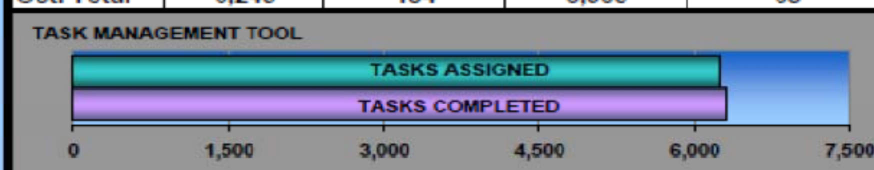




NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGE CALLS			
Language	Calls Offered	Serviced by Bilingual Wrkr	%Serviced by Bilingual Wrkr
Cantonese	1065	763	72%
Spanish	849	628	74%
Vietnamese	144	55	38%
Russian	40	9	23%
Mandarin	75	52	69%
Tagalog	10	10	100%
Total Lang	2183	1,517	69%



TMT	Assigned	Open	Completed	Overdue
RRR	968	3	975	0
QR7	3629	51	3644	19
Verifications	1652	130	1684	44
Alerts	10,409	n/a	n/a	n/a
Oct. Total	6,249	184	6,303	63



Appendix E: Washington's Community Services Division-Call Center (Penn, 2009)