[redacted] Recommendations

US Digital Service | [redacted]

Executive Summary

The followin recommendations are the result of a collaboration between the [redacted] and the United States Digital Service (USDS). **Together, we set the north star goal of [redacted] achieving 100% APT, in addition to improving customer and eligibility worker experiences.**

In order to measure continuous improvement towards the [redacted] north star goal, a continuous metric is needed. As such, across several recommendations below, we reference Time to Process (TTP). This metric is defined as the duration from the moment of receiving a client's submission—whether that be an application, review, or change request—until the moment processing has been completed and eligibility has been determined.

TTP can be calculated usin data that [redacted] already has access to in the [redacted] Portal and [redacted], however it is not currently tracked on an ongoing basis. In the near-term, USDS recommends monitoring changes to TTP over time to understand how changes introduced to client and/or eligibility worker (EW) processes and systems effect progress towards 100% APT.

Through an intensive discover s rint that included shadowing eligibility workers and on-the-ground workshops with key [redacted] staff, we arrived at implementation consensus on the following recommendations.

Below is a summar of the near-term recommendations and their potential impact, based on data provided by [redacted] and [redacted] and estimates provided by eligibility workers.

#	Recommendation	Potential Impact
1	Separate actionable items in workers' queues	Average of 5 minutes of time saved per work item (up to 130 hours saved annually per worker); increased worker satisfaction
2	Clarify the list of documents clients need to provide	Potential average 10 day reduction in TTP for cases requiring income documentation
3	Leverage email and text messages to remind clients of required actions	Up to 41% fewer missed interviews and 13% increase in returned verification documents based on similar campaigns in other states; significantly decreased TTP; increased client satisfaction
4	Streamline irrelevant questions for minors	2-3 minutes of time saved per question set; increased worker satisfaction
5	Improve utility of "due dates" displayed on work items	Reduced context switching and improved productivity; increased worker trust in [redacted]; increased worker satisfaction

Near-term Recommendations

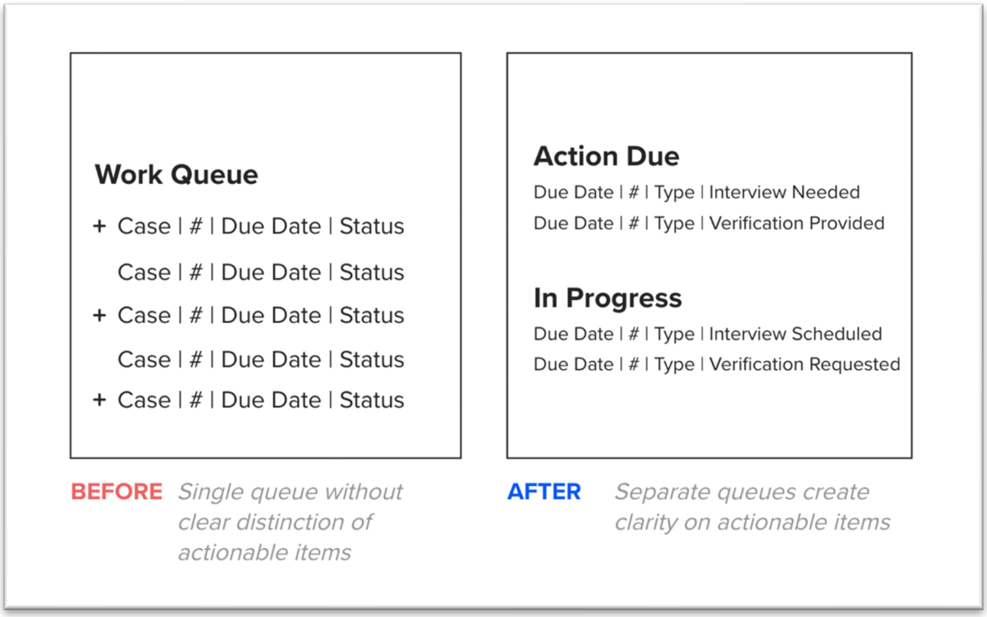
1. Separate actionable items in workers' queues

Current state: When viewing their work queues in [redacted], eligibility workers are confronted with a long list of work items that have no indication as to which are actionable and which are not. Eligibility workers must spend time opening each item to determine if action can be taken, sometimes going multiple clicks into the item for context because the fields have ambiguous, several, or unspecific meanings. This daily exercise is an unnecessary burden on eligibility workers who simply need to know which tasks are workable and which are not. Workers have also indicated that hiding tasks with no worker action is not useful, as the "disappearing" and "reappearing" of work is disruptive and difficult to plan for. Further, non-actionable work items occupy space in the workers' queues, preventing additional actionable items from being assigned.

Proposal: USDS recommends the following:

- [redacted] should work with eligibility staff to split apart these categories, ensuring that 1) the type of submission is shown (e.g. application, review, change report, etc.) and 2) that the action is clear and has a unique meaning (e.g. "interview scheduled", "interview missed", "interview completed", "question submitted to [redacted]", etc.). The group should also ensure that the sum total of these categories' values cover every possible state of a client's submission.
- Furthermore, these need to be defined such that they can be classified as either *actionable* by worker, meaning that the next step for that submission requires work or input from the worker working the case, or *non-actionable*, meaning they are waiting on action from either the client, [redacted] or technology support, or other external actors.
- Once there is a clear bifurcation between *actionable* and *non-actionable* items, [redacted] should update [redacted] to separate workers' action queues into two visually separate queues, one containing *actionable* items, and the other containing the *non-actionable* items. *Non-actionable* items should not count towards the "hours of work" estimate that [redacted] uses to apply a cap to the number of items workers can have in their queue, thus clearing them up to receive more work.

By accomplishing these two parts, workers will be able to see clearly and at a glance what the current status of a case is and the next step that needs to be taken. Additionally, workers will no longer encounter the situation where they have worked all the items in their queue that they can, but the cap for the items in their queue has been met within [redacted] and no new work items can be added.



Concept mockup showing "before" and "after" states of the user interface in [redacted] for work items in the queue, used for illustration purposes only

Implementation considerations: [redacted] should survey eligibility workers in order to understand the full meaning and usage of the current field values before the creation of the next values. Additionally, these updates should be usability tested with eligibility workers in order to ensure that this implementation satisfies the part of its intended purpose of adding clarity and brevity to items in workers' queues. Design consideration should be taken for submissions that have multiple concurrent work items (e.g. have submitted to Medicaid and SNAP, and have outstanding actions for each), particularly around usability testing in how those should be viewed.

Deloitte provided a preliminary estimate for the overall effort of this work as Low.

Impact: [redacted] eligibility workers estimate that they spend anywhere from 1-10 minutes per work item clicking into the work item to understand whether or not it's actionable. One eligibility worker estimated that this adds up to roughly 1-2 hours each week depending on the cases assigned.

Providing eligibility workers with a separate queue indicating which tasks are actionable and which are will allow them to more efficiently use their time. Work items that do not need attention will be clearly demarcated from those that do, allowing workers the full perspective into which items are workable in their queue at a glance without having to do additional investigation.

This reduction in time required to understand the status of items in their queue as well as the additional work items that will automatically fill queues will result in more work items completed per eligibility worker per day.

Next steps: This work will be championed by [redacted] with support from [redacted]

	Task	Owner	Completion Date	Others Involved
1	Draft eligibility worker survey	[redacted]		[redacted]
2	Define which types and which statuses are actionable and non-actionable	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
3	Usability test split queue UI with eligibility workers	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
4	Add/update type and status in [redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
5	Distinguish between actionable and non-actionable items in [redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
6	Update [redacted] UI to display multiple queues	[redacted]		[redacted]
7	Update work queue logic to not count non-actionable items towards queue maximum	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

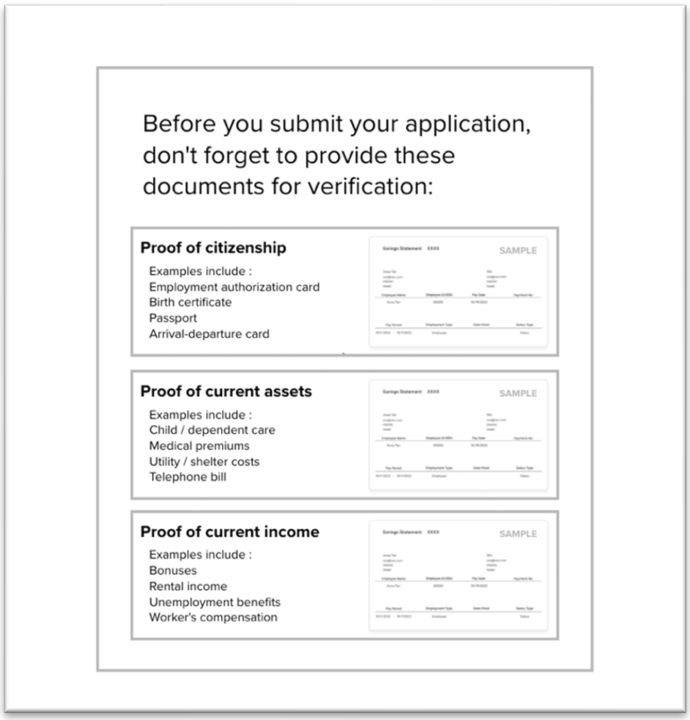
2. Clarify the list of documents clients need to provide

Current state: While SNAP clients are not required to provide supporting documentation when submitting an application or review, it is very likely that they will need to do so before an eligibility worker can make a final eligibility determination. A majority of the eligibility workers USDS spoke with indicated that 70-90% of submissions have incorrect, incomplete, or none of the needed documentation. Waiting for clients to provide this documentation can add a significant amount of time to overall TTP, if it is returned at all. For example, for submissions received in [redacted] income documentation (the most common request) took an average of approximately 10 days to be provided.

Proposal: By encouraging clients to provide the right supporting documentation up front, [redacted] can improve eligibility workers' ability to process cases more quickly. This can be accomplished by making updates to both the [redacted] online application and to the [redacted] paper application to:

- Describe documentation types and when a client may need to include them in their submission, using plain language,
- Provide examples of the most common documents for each type

These updates can also be used as the basis for a paper checklist provided to clients at service centers or in onsite signage. Future improvements could include highlighting in the [redacted] experience exactly which documentation types the client may want to submit, based on the information they entered in their submission previously.



Concept mockup showing a unified list of verification documents, written in plain language, and showing example documents, used for illustration purposes only

Implementation considerations: Existing work has been done to come up with examples of acceptable documents for each verification needed. USDS recommends using this as a starting point for these improvements, while leveraging the knowledge of the eligibility workers, supervisors, and [redacted] to help refine this list.

Impact: USDS expects these changes to increase the number of submissions that are submitted that include documentation, and decrease the amount of time it takes for clients to respond in providing requested documentation. Both will contribute to an overall reduction in TTP. To baseline and measure this impact on an ongoing basis, [redacted] will need to produce reliable, repeated queries to measure:

- Monthly percentage of applications, expedited applications and reviews that did not require additional verification documents
- Monthly average time for needed documentation to be provided after the missing verification notice is generated

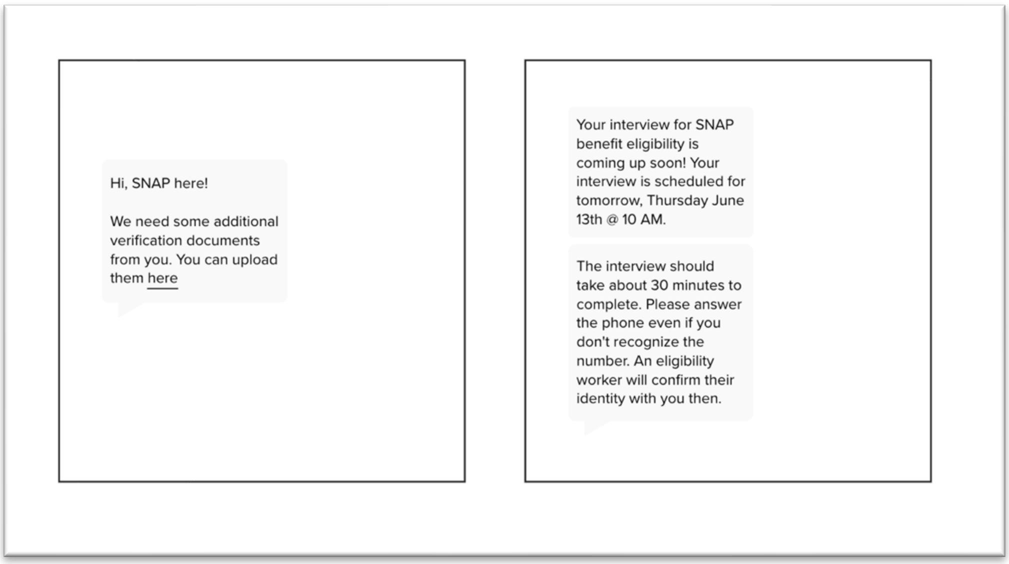
Next steps: This work will be championed by [redacted] with support from [redacted]

	Task	Owner	Completion Date	Others Involved
1	Share document examples that were developed via workgroup	Deloitte (Abdul)	06/13/24	
2	Review document examples with service delivery team to confirm they are the best examples	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
3	Convene [redacted] program policy SMEs to develop plain language checklist that applies across all ro rams	[redacted]	[redacted]	
[redacted]	[redacted] upload screen and wireframe updates to include documentation examples	[redacted]	[redacted]	
5	Develop implementation plan and [redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
6	Incorporate updated plain language checklist into integrated paper app	[redacted]	TBD	
7	Build, test and deploy [redacted] changes to the document upload screen	[redacted]	TBD	

3. Leverage email and text messages to remind clients of required actions

Current state: Currently, clients receive notices via postal mail for scheduling of interviews, requests for information, and other communications from [redacted]. These notices may not reach the recipient in time to take the required action on their case, putting them at risk of losing access. The timeliness report from [redacted] highlighted interview notices as an important example in which notices were failing to reach clients prior to the actual interview itself. While this is an important step in the submission journey, there are many others in which text and email could be also be valuable in prompting client action.

Proposal: Other states across the country, including [redacted] and Louisiana, have implemented successful email and text campaigns to remind benefits clients of key upcoming actions and appointments. By implementing text and email reminders for key events in the journey for SNAP clients, such as upcoming interviews and required verifications, [redacted] can significantly reduce significant stretches of time during which eligibility workers are waiting on client actions to move cases forward. USDS proposes leveraging existing best practices to create plain language messages for these reminders.



Concept mockup of example SMS reminders received by clients for key actions needed for their application, used for illustration purposes only

Implementation considerations: USDS understands there are two existing technologies being considered for sending text message notifications. The first is the existing system capability that can generate such notifications via an SMS capability provided by [redacted] although this solution may be cost prohibitive for the [redacted] to implement. The second involves an ongoing exploration to integrate a third-party service provider [redacted] that has not yet been completed. In addition to cost and legal evaluations, there are also use case-specific considerations, such as the ability to send notifications at specific scheduled times (or in real time) to support interview reminders, customize messaging to include interview dates and times, and the regulatory and policy evaluation needed to balance utility and privacy.

Impact: USDS believes this approach can impact two key moments in the journey by increasing the channels through which clients are notified beyond existing mail notices. First, it can decrease the number of missed or rescheduled interviews, which eligibility workers polled suggested is between 25-50% of interviews. Second, it can decrease the overall time that eligibility workers are waiting on the client to provide verification documentation. Eligibility workers estimated that 70-90% of clients provide incorrect, incomplete, or no verification documentation. To measure the impact of this change, [redacted] and [redacted] will need to provide reliable reports on:

- Monthly rates of missed SNAP interviews

- Monthly average time for needed documentation to be provided after the missing verification notice is generated

Next steps: This work will be championed by [redacted] with support from [redacted]

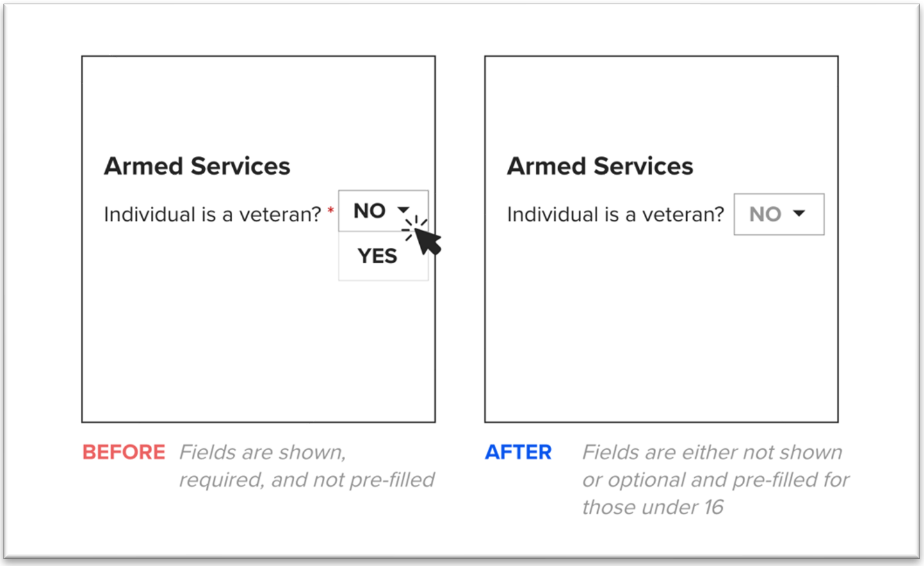
	Task	Owner	Completion Date	Others Involved
[redacted]	[redacted] software, [redacted] legal team to review completed risk assessment	[redacted]	[redacted]	
2	Evaluate [redacted] real-time SMS capabilities	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
3	Get legal clearance for texting clients and parameters for content	[redacted]	[redacted]	
4	Determine feasibility and plan for pilot [redacted] case study, review other existing projects for guidance)	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
5	Pilot [redacted] texting for key notices	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
6	Review baseline data / measure success	[redacted]	[redacted]	

4. Streamline irrelevant questions for minors

Current state: When processing a submission, eligibility workers must answer a wide variety of questions for each individual on the case. However certain questions are irrelevant for minors, but are displayed regardless. Irrelevant questions include whether or not a minor under the age of 16 is a veteran of the armed forces, whether or not a young minor below working age is on strike, and whether or not a newborn is a felon.

These questions are required to be answered for every person on the case and add time to the processing of a submission.

Proposal: Remove the need for eligibility workers to spend time manually entering unnecessary information into these screens for each minor on a case. There are two ways this could be approached. The first is to use conditional so that minor questions are flagged as optional and automatically pre-filled for household members under a certain age. The second is to use conditional logic to hide non-required and/or irrelevant minor questions so that eligibility workers are not shown the minor questions at all for household members under a certain age.



Concept mockup showing "before" and "after" states of the user interface in [redacted] with questions about minors in the household, used for illustration purposes only

Implementation considerations: First, USDS recommends [redacted] solicit feedback from eligibility workers on the top minor questions which are pain points across processing. Second, [redacted] should align policy on the age at which questions are not relevant. Third, USDS recommends that [redacted] work with eligibility workers to determine which of the above implementation approaches would be most effective at reducing TTP.

Impact: Eligibility workers estimate that changes could result in time savings of 2-3 minutes per set of questions for every minor for whom the questions do not apply.

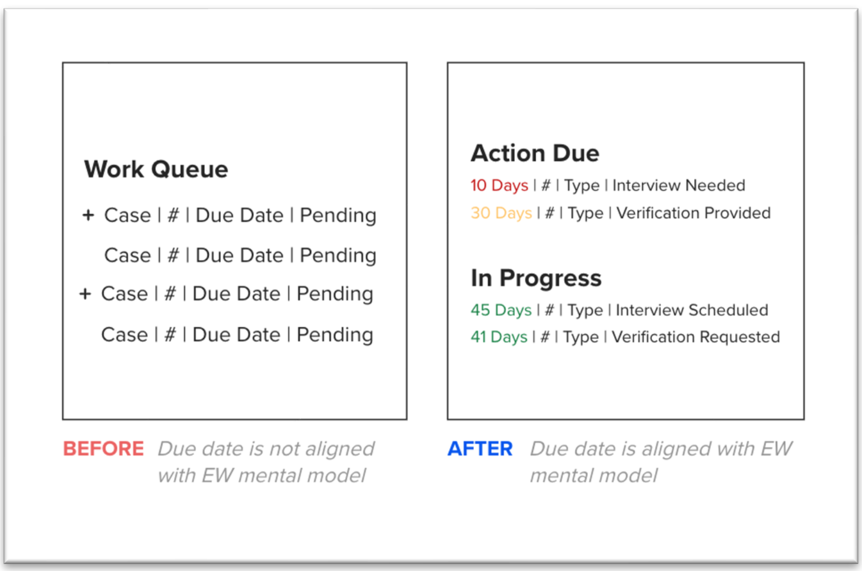
Next steps: This work will be championed by [redacted] with support from [redacted]

	Task	Owner	Completion Date	[redacted]
1	Work with eligibility worker and managers to solicit feedback on which minor questions to target	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
2	Review program policies for each question	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
3	Determine an age threshold for each question, and a default.	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
4	Make questions optional based on age and pre-fill defaults using conditional logic	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

5. Improve utility of the "due date" for work items in workers' queues

Current state: When viewing their work queues in [redacted] eligibility workers are exposed to work items that have specific due dates assigned to them. However, the due date that is shown is not how eligibility workers currently think about organizing and prioritizing their work. Currently workers do not work top to bottom in their queue, which is what [redacted] has requested and USDS has been told is the reason for the current due date. This also results in EWs tracking cases outside of [redacted] in their own ways, such as through excel, outlook, or in a folder structure. They spend time clicking back and forth between their systems, adding time to their processing time. The lack of ability to skim and prioritize work confidently creates an extra burden on eligibility workers and can create extra processing times for beneficiaries.

Proposal: [redacted] should align "due dates" displayed in [redacted] work queues with current eligibility worker mental models and expectations. The group should determine the various definitions and how the various definitions should or should not be used to define work prioritization. Once the various paradigms are discussed and further defined, the team can decide which would be most helpful to show in the work queue. This logic should then be updated in [redacted] and communicated out to [redacted] staff.



Concept mockup showing "before" and "after" states of the user interface in [redacted] for work items in the queue, used for illustration purposes only

Implementation considerations: A few considerations should be taken into account with this implementation. The first is the ways in which eligibility workers still think about their work load; because they view an entire submission as their own (vs. specific work items), the date that they may request to be shown may not align with how a work item appears. Additionally, the 5 programs in the system and overseen by workers may make showing one date difficult. Design and testing should work to navigate these complexities.

Impact: One of the main goals of this proposal is to increase trust in [redacted] and to have eligibility workers be able to track their work within the system. By reducing the need for personal date tracking, eligibility workers will spend less time switching between screens and personally managed files. Possible impact metrics may include eligibility worker & customer support center satisfaction scores.

Next steps: This work will be championed by [redacted] with support from [redacted]

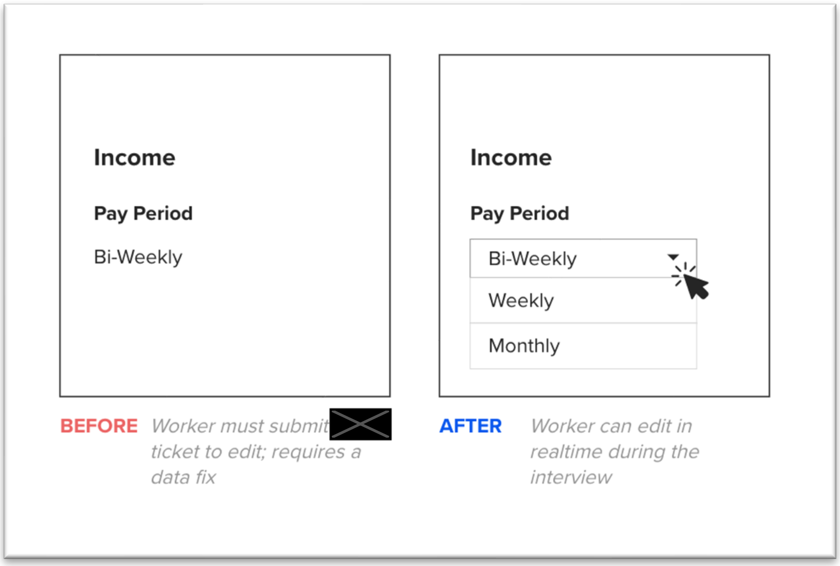
	Task	Owner	[redacted]	[redacted]
1	[redacted] Team to bring together work group to align on aligned due date definition	[redacted] [redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
2	Agree and approve "due date" definitions to move forward	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
3	Discuss technical implementations needed	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
4	Create roadmap, including usability testing	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
5	Develop & Test	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
6	Inform EWs of upcoming change	[redacted]	[redacted]	
7	Launch update	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

Longer-term Recommendations

6. Streamline process for correcting income data

Current state: When a submission comes into [redacted] from the [redacted], income fields are not editable by eligibility workers. When these require correction, the eligibility worker must delete them and start from scratch or submit a [redacted] ticket, adding significant time to the processing of a submission. Because the terminology around income can be confusing ("biweekly" versus "semi-monthly", etc.), correction is often required.

Proposal: Income fields should be easily editable by eligibility workers to provide the ability to correct information without submitting a [redacted] ticket.



Concept mockup showing "before" and "after" states of the user interface in [redacted] for income fields, used for illustration purposes only

Implementation considerations: Changes to the income fields are already under considering in multiple groups; it may be beneficial to include these changes as part of work that is already planned.

Impact: Income records are frequently incorrect. One eligibility worker stated: "Almost every app I work I have to rework the income section." The topic "income record updates" is a recurring trend for [redacted] tickets. Providing the ability to alter these fields will reduce the amount of time eligibility workers are spending manually fixing them or waiting on [redacted] tickets to correct them.

Next steps: This work will be championed by [redacted] with support from [redacted]

	Task	Owner	Completion Date	Others Involved
1	Perform discovery with EWs to understand the challenge and need	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
2	Mock up proposed solution	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
3	Get feedback on mockups from EWs	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
4	Write user stories to document how this solution should work	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
5	Discuss technical implementations needed	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

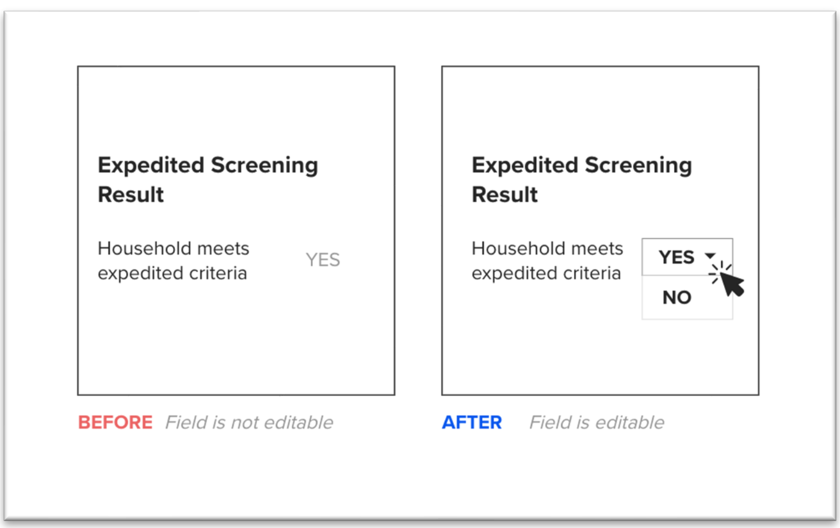
6	Develop & Test	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
7	Inform EWs of upcoming change			
8	Launch update	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

7. Address issues with inaccurate expedited screening flag

Current state: During the [redacted] visit, a sample of expedited cases that were processed untimely were provided to [redacted]. Upon review, a portion of these cases (16%) were determined to be marked expedited incorrectly, and were in fact processed timely by non-expedited standards. The incorrect classification of the case resulted in a lower APT for [redacted].

The expedited flag is set by [redacted] based on the case data itself. Eligibility workers have expressed the desire for the ability to modify this flag when processing a submission in order to indicate that it should be non-expedited. This can happen often, as many clients do not completely fill out the income section of their submission. In theory, adding additional information to the case should alter the expedited flag, but because the flag can be incorrect, this may not happen as expected. Workers currently submit [redacted] tickets in order to correct the flag, which increases the processing time of a case.

Proposal: The expedited status calculation should be investigated in order to determine why the cases were incorrectly marked as expedited, and it should be corrected. Changes requested by eligibility workers should be revisited as a potential efficiency-increasing change.



Concept mockup showing "before" and "after" states of the user interface in [redacted] for work items in the queu, used for illustration purposes only

Implementation considerations: In the near-term, [redacted] should conduct discovery with the [redacted] team as to any outstanding expedited flag system defects. Longer-term, USDS encourages [redacted] to conduct additional discovery with eligibility workers to understand the full scope of challenges with the expedited flag, in addition to discovery with data and technical teams to identify complexity and scope of changes.

Impact: The correction of the eligibility determination defect will result in a more accurate and higher APT calculation for ND. Providing eligibility workers with the ability to alter this flag will reduce the amount of [redacted] tickets submitted for incorrect cases, allowing them to process cases more efficiently.

Next steps: This work will be supported by [redacted]

	Task	Owner	Completion Date	Others Involved
1	Understand outstanding defect(s)—if any—around expedited flag not updating	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
2	Understand existing user stories	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
3	Gather input from workers and [redacted] regarding how to scope additional feature to meet worker needs	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]