

THE  
ACADEMY  
FOR PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Assistance Programs:  
Strategies to Increase Efficiencies

**Prepared by:** Chelsea Payne, MSW

**March 2018**



INSPIRING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS  
IN HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**CONTENTS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 2  
INTRODUCTION ..... 3  
BUSINESS PROCESS CHANGES ..... 6  
POLICY CHANGES .....14  
TECHNOLOGY CHANGES .....18  
EVALUATION .....21  
REFERENCES .....31  
APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES BY STATE .....33

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

At the request of the Southern Area Consortium of Human Services (SACHS), this research report was prepared to help address the counties' need to continue to serve clients through their assistance programs while also adapting to a changing fiscal and political environment. This report summarizes research from the Work Support Strategies (WSS) initiative (2011-2016), a multi-state project intended to increase efficiencies in serving clients seeking public benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, child care assistance, and others.

The WSS initiative worked toward the goal of increasing administrative efficiencies by addressing three general areas: *Business Process Reengineering*, *Updating Technology*, and *Policy Change*. This report will provide examples from six states on implementation strategies, lessons learned, outcome data, and potential cost-savings.

All states addressed their business processes, assessing their current processes to identify inefficiencies and then implementing changes ranging from the design and flow of their lobbies, to the distribution and responsibilities of caseloads, to how to process applications and renewals.

Technology upgrades were implemented to support the policy and business process changes and aid efficiencies. Upgrades included simpler changes such as managing and storing cases electronically, and more complex changes such as each state implementing or upgrading an integrated eligibility system for clients to enroll in multiple programs with a more streamlined process.

States also made several policy changes to streamline and align policies to make enrollment simpler for both the clients and workers. Some states changed policies to reduce unnecessary verification requirements, aligned certification periods, combined program applications, and/or used electronic data for cross-program auto enrollment.

The evaluation of the WSS initiative took place over the course of the entire initiative. Outcome data and research on the cost-saving benefits to both the client and agency are summarized at the end of this report. States reported improvements in application processing, reduction of churn, and benefit delivery with cost-saving potential documented with the reduction of time and money spent due to changes such as integrated public benefit applications and the utilization of more efficient technologies.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The following report will summarize research from the Work Support Strategies (WSS) initiative and describe how six states implemented business process changes, technology changes, and streamlined policies to improve the delivery of their work support benefits in their respective states. This summary generally pulls from research from the following resources, also accessible in the References section at the end of this report.

- Context on the Six Work Support Strategies States: Supplement to WSS Evaluation Publications
- Improving Business Processes for Delivering Work Supports for Low-Income Families: Findings from the Work Support Strategies Evaluation
- Changing Policies to Streamline Access to Medicaid, SNAP, and Child Care Assistance: Findings from the Work Support Strategies Evaluation
- States' Use of Technology to Improve Delivery of Benefits: Findings from the Work Support Strategies Evaluation
- Improving the Efficiency of Benefit Delivery: Outcomes from the Work Support Strategies Evaluation
- Findings from the Work Support Strategies Evaluation: Streamlining Access, Strengthening Families

### **Overview of WSS Initiative<sup>1</sup>**

The WSS initiative was a multi-state project whose goal was to serve clients more efficiently, while also improving the worker's experience providing benefits in work support programs (see list of programs below). Six states participated: Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and South Carolina.

The WSS initiative grants were awarded in 2010, at the height of a recession when states needed to find ways to serve more clients with fewer staff. Their goal was to increase efficiencies throughout their agencies so that fewer staff could keep up with the rising workloads. Planning began in 2011, implementation started 2012, and funding ended in 2016.

States that participated in WSS were diverse in many regards, including their reasons for joining the initiative, administrative structure for delivering services, political governance, and organization of the initiative within their state. The programs involved in each state varied slightly, but below are the programs covered by at least one state:

---

<sup>1</sup> Hahn, H., Isaacs, J., Rohacek, M. (2016). Context on the six Work Support Strategies states: Supplement to WSS evaluation publications. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Medical Programs
  - Medicaid
  - Child Health Plan Plus
  - Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) (program name can differ by state)
  - All Kids
  - Medical Assistance
- Child Care Assistance
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (program name can differ by state)
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program
- State/County Special Assistance

For more information on the background of the states during the WSS initiative, see [Context on the Six Work Support Strategies States<sup>2</sup>](#).

**Goal of the WSS initiative:** “to reform, modernize, and align the systems delivering work support programs intended to increase families’ well-being and stability, particularly the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program, and child care assistance through the Child Care and Development Block Grant. The WSS states aimed to improve their processes to deliver benefits to families efficiently and accurately while minimizing burdens on families and workers. States were motivated by the fundamental goal of providing efficient service to the public and by the current economic and policy environments that prompted them to act.”<sup>3</sup>

As aforementioned, limited state resources and insufficient staffing were initial motivators for business process changes in nearly all of the WSS states. Business process reengineering, updated technology, and advocacy for policy change were all intended to allow for states to do more with less. All six states struggled with rising caseloads coupled with reductions in available staff.

Through grants, expert technical assistance, and peer learning, the initiative changed various facets of the states’ work support program policies, business processes, use of technology, and the delivery of benefits. This report will outline the key highlights of each of those changes made, lessons learned, and key examples from the states. Evaluations from this initiative were conducted and are included in this report as well as estimated cost-saving benefits of the implemented changes. The evaluation process took place over the course of the entire initiative (2011-2016), with data collected from hundreds of individual and group interviews completed during annual site visits, as well as reviews of planning documents, various agency reports,

---

<sup>2</sup> Hahn, H., Isaacs, J., Rohacek, M. (2016). Context on the six Work Support Strategies states: Supplement to WSS evaluation publications. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

<sup>3</sup> Isaacs, J., Katz, M., Kassabian, D. (2016). Changing policies to streamline access to Medicaid, SNAP, and child care assistance: Findings from the Work Support Strategies evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

reports from secondary sources, data tracked by agencies, client experience surveys and focus groups conducted by the evaluation team. Evaluations from this initiative were conducted by the Urban Institute.

### **Overview of the Grant/Funding**

- This initiative was funded largely by the Ford Foundation (a total of \$21 million over 5 years) with support from the Open Society Foundations, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and JPMorgan Chase. WSS was directed by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) in partnership with the Urban Institute (evaluation and fiscal management lead) and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) (technical assistance lead).
- Each state received about \$250,000 per year. States used most of the funds to hire data analysts, business process specialists, and staff who could manage and coordinate the state's efforts. About 20 percent of funds were used to hire vendors/consultants to help with business process changes. About 15 percent of funding went to conferences and training for staff.
- Each state had access to a WSS Technical Assistance Team provided expertise in child care, health, SNAP, data, and business process improvements via phone, on-site meetings, and webinars. Conferences were organized yearly for states to share insights.
- The structure of the grant encouraged states to stay accountable among inevitable competing priorities.

This report summarizes several different reports of the WSS initiative. It outlines the *Business Process Changes, Policy Changes, and Technology Changes* that took place to support the vision of the initiative and outcomes for the states. This report also includes some cost-saving and evaluation data from the WSS states. For complete overviews of the WSS initiative, including additional reports by state, see the References section.

### **Supplemental WSS Report on Leadership**

Observations of Leaders Driving Changes in State Government<sup>4</sup>

- Colorado and Illinois provided leadership tools and lessons on driving change in their states during the WSS initiative through an analysis of the context and challenges.
  - Dozens of interviews with agency leaders in different levels of leadership and community stakeholders were conducted and combined with evaluation and data from the WSS initiative to look at the role that leadership in their respective social services agencies played when implementing the changes of the WSS initiative.
  - Three themes emerged from the data that supported the states' implementation of creating successful change:

---

<sup>4</sup> Hahn, H., Gearing, M., Katz, M., Amin, R. (2015). Observations of leaders driving changes in State government: Leadership tools and lessons from two work support strategy states. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

- Creating a clear shared vision and showing passion for the mission
- Building trusting reciprocal relationships inside and outside government
- Creating mutual accountability for shared, objective, and measurable goals
- Six tools helped the two states create an environment in which change could be accomplished and while not always successful, these tools equipped the leadership with what they needed to attempt to bring about change.
  - Framing the mission
  - Communicating creatively and effectively
  - Building inclusive teams of stakeholders
  - Creating an atmosphere of transparency and honesty
  - Showing results and taking risks
  - Establishing mutual ownership of problems and solutions amongst stakeholders through objective measurement of progress

### **BUSINESS PROCESS CHANGES<sup>5</sup>**

This report highlights business process implementation strategies, barriers and successes, evaluation findings, and the effects of the changes on program efficiencies and client well-being. For the purpose of WSS, business processes are defined as “how a social service office organizes the work of greeting customers, accepting applications, making eligibility determinations, and all other aspects of helping individuals and families access and retain the supports for which they are eligible”. *Table 1* below outlines the motivating factors of each state in their desire to improve their business processes.

***Table 1: What Motivated WSS States to Improve Business Processes, by State<sup>6</sup>***

	Colorado	Idaho	Illinois	North Carolina	Rhode Island	South Carolina
More efficient use of existing resources	X	X	X	X	X	
Alignment with new or updated technology	X	X		X	X	X
Respond to increase in cases (due to ACA, due to recession, etc.)	X	X	X	X	X	
Improve timeliness	X		X	X		X
Reduce burdensome processes	X	X		X	X	X
Respond to insufficient staffing levels (because short on funds)	X	X	X	X	X	
Reduce administrative costs		X			X	X
Improve client experience (physical office; waiting room time)		X	X	X		
Improve staff morale			X	X	X	
Coordinate across programs or implement “No Wrong Door” approach		X		X	X	X
Distribute workload more evenly across staff		X				
Increase program participation	X					
Improve or maintain program integrity		X				

<sup>5</sup> Hahn, H., Amin, Kassabian, D., Gearing, M. (2016). Improving business processes for delivering work supports for low-income families: Findings from the Work Support Strategies evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

<sup>6</sup> Hahn, H., Amin, Kassabian, D., Gearing, M. (2016). Improving business processes for delivering work supports for low-income families: Findings from the Work Support Strategies evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Strategies identified by states that helped them implement changes are outlined below.

### **Overarching Strategies**

- *Leadership of Business Process Reengineering (BPR) Efforts*
  - States varied in the ways they led their efforts, but many included forming diverse workgroups with representation from varying levels of the agency and community. Each state had a Central Workgroup/WSS Team, some states had additional workgroups and/or subcommittees.
  - Each state hired external business process change specialists to help offices implement changes.
  - Colorado, South Carolina, and Rhode Island contracted with vendors who specialized in business process changes. South Carolina developed an eligibility process improvement collaborative. Illinois and Idaho hired contract employees to lead efforts and work with local offices. North Carolina partnered with North Carolina State University to train staff on business processes.
- *Diagnosing Problems through Process Mapping and Other Needs Assessments*
  - Some states began by assessing needs and mapping current processes. Frontline workers and supervisors participated in workshops to identify current processes, backlog and inefficiencies, and then suggested ways to streamline processes. For example, in South Carolina, staff would draw the physical space of offices in assessing the needs and areas for improvement.
- *BPR Contractor On-Site Support and Software*
  - Colorado, Rhode Island, and South Carolina contracted with the Change and Innovation Agency (CIA) to develop and implement business process changes. CIA introduced process management software to assist in lobby and non-lobby work. Their work involved writing assessment reports, leading two-week design team meetings with many frontline staff and managers, being on-site during rollout of the new processes, and holding ongoing conference calls following the rollout.
- *Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA), Small Pilots, and Incremental Approaches*
  - Small changes and/or implementing changes by starting in a few offices, allowed states to decide when and how to implement broader changes. Teaching staff the cycle of the PDSA approach allowed workers in some states to implement business process changes without the help of technical assistance.
  - Some counties and states rolled out big changes in pilot offices first:
    - South Carolina had two rounds of pilots in two counties: first changing the process of determining eligibility for Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF, and then trying to improve the flow of traffic in the lobby.
    - Rhode Island piloted same day service for SNAP before rolling it out statewide.



- Illinois piloted the change from case-based to task-based case management in local offices first. By doing so, they were able to make the decision that rolling out this change statewide was not in their best interest.
- Idaho implemented lobby management and workflow software region by region.
- Colorado offered counties smaller WSS funded grants to test strategies (i.e. funding lobby kiosks, providing dual monitors, and giving staff the ability to scan case files to add to document imaging systems). Ten counties also received small grants to test an approach of allowing counties to share staff, pool resources, and integrate services.
- Some counties made incremental changes in a larger number of offices
  - Illinois repainted offices and installed new signs to improve atmosphere.
  - North Carolina had trouble cross-training staff in SNAP and Medicaid processes so they reconfigured to only train on the eligibility portion of integrating those services and not the backend procedures.
  - Idaho began with statewide discussion on how they operated as a statewide workforce (not exclusive by geographic region) and discussed statewide culture implications like the idea of “our work” rather than “my work” and shifting work around to accommodate workload issues. Idaho worked to consistently adapt to the changing needs, eliminating unnecessary processes, and making adjustments as needed as they go.

### **Changes to Business Processes**

The business process changes implemented in the WSS states were made to provide better service delivery, including how long it should take to process applications and other transactions, as well as improving the application and renewal methods for families, and the degree of integration of the different work support programs. In general, changes involved updates to lobbies and customer service systems, reallocation of work across the workforce, and the streamlining and simplification of processes. An overview of changes can be found in the summaries below.

- *Expectations for Processing Time and Place:* States changed their expectations for processing time to minimize the time between receiving an application and issuing assistance. An ideal goal being that clients can receive work support benefits the same day they apply. Almost all WSS states expanded the options for clients to apply for work support benefits online or on the phone.
  - In Idaho, recipients became able to view their enrollment status and renew their program eligibility online, saving the time to come into the office to enroll.
  - In Rhode Island, at least one SNAP worker was assigned to processing applications right away so eligible applicants could leave the office with an EBT

card. After implementing with SNAP, they then provided same day service with TANF, although it proved to be difficult given that clients had to see two workers, one for eligibility and one for developing an employment plan.

- *Cross-Program Integration:* Some states integrated business processes across programs in order to provide a better customer experience and more efficient administrative processes.
  - Idaho trained staff to conduct a single eligibility interview for SNAP and Medicaid. They found that after they adjusted to this process, the integrated interview was only taking minutes longer than one would for a single program.
  - Rhode Island, South Carolina, and some counties in North Carolina integrated the intake process for multiple programs (concept called “no wrong door”) and trained universal workers who were capable of processing applications for multiple programs at once. South Carolina has separate agencies that run Medicaid and SNAP, so this approach tried to connect customers to all relevant programs through one lobby and helped to reduce a customer telling their story multiple times. Trained staff in each office help to triage customers and direct them to the right window for their services.
  - Illinois integrated the processes related to child care assistance with SNAP and Medicaid. Child care assistance is run by private entities in Illinois, so a liaison list was developed that allowed both the private and public sector to collaborate in this regard, removing the customer and the intermediary.
- *Lobby:* Changing the lobby area to improve customer flow and experience included improving the physical appearance of the lobby, changing the lobby layout, introducing lobby management software to track client wait times and needs, and re-allocating staff during the day to accommodate client needs.
  - Illinois started their changes by first cleaning and repainting their offices to be more inviting and increase morale.
  - Rhode Island and Idaho changed their signage and design of their public spaces.
  - North and South Carolina made changes to the physical space of their lobby to address congestion.
  - Some offices added drop boxes for clients dropping off documents.
  - In order to better direct customers in the lobby, some offices has assigned staff to guide families to the right place.
  - Some offices added more eligibility-trained workers to the front desk in order to process applications on the spot. Private front desk spaces were also added to some offices to make room for quick interviews and special transactions.
  - States had to find a balance between lowering wait times in lobbies and processing applications day-of. In one county in Colorado, applications submitted in-person, by mail, or online were treated equally. In other states, applications

were processed equally unless there was a large number of people waiting in the lobby, in which case, staff shifted their priorities to processing those applications.

- *Allocation of Work:* A core part of WSS was to eliminate unnecessary steps and reduce idle time between actions.
  - Several states moved toward a task-based approach meaning that throughout the entirety of a case, the tasks were split up and workers specialized in an aspect(s) of the case instead of the case as a whole.
    - In 2015, Rhode Island shifted to task-based case management system for Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, and child care, although some complicated Medicaid cases were still assigned to individual workers.
    - Counties in Colorado varied in how they made their changes; one county changed SNAP to work as a task-based model; another county only moved ongoing cases to task-based; another county changed their entire office to task-based.
  - In all WSS states, business processes usually combined different approaches based on the needs and complexities of certain programs. States found that it was beneficial to have specialized workers in more complicated programs like TANF.
  - Some states developed standardized instructions and resources for workers to be more consistent when completing tasks.
  - *Universal Workers*
    - Many states had the choice of having program-specific workers or universal/generic workers. A universal worker has the benefit of having a person who can work across programs but the added challenge of needing to be trained in multiple functions.
    - In Idaho, universal workers were a part of a statewide queue who could be called upon for a variety of work/tasks.
  - *Shared Caseloads:* Sharing caseloads happens with a task-based approach, but some WSS offices also shared caseloads across offices or the whole state.
    - In Colorado, 10 counties created a collaborative for rural offices to receive processing assistance and training from a shared staff member.
    - Idaho expanded on the universally shared caseload the most by having universal workers who could pull caseload/work from their own office, the region, and the entire state to assist when other regions had high caseloads. Idaho chose this workforce model after having to reduce staff in small offices. This model allowed staff to stay in their smaller offices and still work on caseloads statewide.
  - *Specialized Statewide Units*
    - South Carolina Department of Social Services has a “regional specialized workflow” where each region handles an aspect of the work for the whole

state. For example, SNAP interviews are conducted in a call center for the entire region rather than one office.

- *Workflow Management Software*
  - Most WSS states utilized workflow management software and some agencies used the same software to assist with the flow of people in the lobby and the work behind the desk.
  - In Idaho, a lobby flow system, Qflow was implemented. This lowered time spent waiting, queuing cases, assigning tasks, monitoring customer volume, and processing tasks. They now manage their ongoing case maintenance and work that is generated by phone and online interactions through a software system called Integrated Benefit Eligibility System.
  - Rhode Island, South Carolina, and some counties in Colorado used the Change and Innovation Agency's Pathos software to track wait times and to reallocate staff based on needs throughout the day.
  - In North Carolina, an automated eligibility system, NC FAST, made it difficult to integrate SNAP and Medicaid eligibility and although the system could process applications for both programs, it required staff to have extensive knowledge of the different software components to manage the system effectively.
- *Standardization of Business Processes:* States and counties can vary greatly in their degree of standardization depending on culture and expectation of county-administered versus state-administered procedures.
  - Illinois initially supported local offices having a lot of flexibility in how they rolled out changes and best practices, however after a year of implementation, the diverse business processes made it difficult to implement an integrated eligibility computer system that could work in all offices, and thus they moved to a statewide standardized task-based procedure.
  - Colorado offered counties the assistance of third party vendors who specialized in business process changes and eight of the largest counties accepted, making the majority of the state more streamlined than they had been. Colorado also has a statewide single benefits management system that requires standardized policy training.

### **Issues Affecting Business Process Changes**

- *Incremental Approaches and Continuous Improvement:* Since implementing many and/or large changes at once can be overwhelming for workers, agency culture, and successful outcomes, many WSS states implemented at least one business process change incrementally rather than swiftly and broadly. This approach allowed staff to learn and make changes over time and potentially minimize risk.

- Rhode Island slowly and incrementally implemented the rollout of a statewide recertification for SNAP cases; doing so allowed them to ensure they had enough employees to successfully manage the changes.
- Idaho added features to their self-service web-portal one at a time which provided the state information on the development of future features.
- *Alignment with Technology:* A potential barrier to effectively providing services was having technology that is aligned with the vision for service delivery. States had to ensure that business process changes and service delivery were well facilitated through technology. Rhode Island and North Carolina faced challenges in this regard.
  - When Rhode Island rolled out the statewide recertification process for SNAP, they did so before securing scanning technology and going paperless, creating issues among office workers when it came to sharing files and booking recertifications.
  - In North Carolina, the automated eligibility system did not end up being able to support their task-based case management model recommended by the state as best practice.
- *Data:*<sup>7</sup> Effective data collection assisted in identifying where change was needed, how to set priorities, and how to monitor progress. A barrier was developing meaningful metrics for their business processes and interpreting the data they had.
- *Local Differences and County Control:* State officials had to find a balance between encouraging consistency with the changes and processes being implemented and allowing for local flexibility, given that what works for some counties may not work for others.
  - In Colorado, counties were grouped by size to share best practices with each other.
  - In Colorado and North Carolina, state social service agencies left the business process changes up to the counties but provided them with toolkits, external support, and any guidance they needed for implementation.
- *Time Pressures, Large Workloads, and Temporary Setbacks:* Many of the business process changes that were implemented were based on time pressures and large workloads, meaning that some states and processes might have experienced temporary lower quality customer service while changes were being implemented.
  - Some states made a large, one-time push to catch up on work before implementing changes.
  - Rhode Island's core WSS team decided that they had to work on some of their 10,000 case backlog before starting to roll out task-based case management and a universal workforce.
- *Pilot Office Selection:* Choosing the offices to pilot changes ended up being crucial and states like Rhode Island and Illinois regretted choosing their largest, most challenging

---

<sup>7</sup> See "Evaluation" section for more information on data and outcome measurements.

offices because the pilots depleted their resources. This ended up slowing down the overall timeline for roll out and provided a discouraging example.

- *Staff Training on Process and Management:* Training staff was crucial in gaining buy-in and increasing capacity for making changes. Some states not only addressed the changing of tasks and policies, but also the aspects of organizational culture that were in the way of providing better customer service. Barriers to effective training included the overwhelming amount of knowledge a universal worker must know, the time needed to train staff while they also continued to serve clients daily, and the skills and knowledge needed for supervisors to manage additional processes.
  - In Illinois, staff training on standardized procedures, electronic verification, and other systems reportedly encouraged staff to feel excited for the change.
  - Idaho used state-of-the-art video training sessions to train staff on new processes and to clarify the vision for the business process reengineering. Idaho also utilized post-training tests to increase transfer of learning. Idaho's training approach focused heavily on creating a culture that had a platform for change.
  - Some states and counties did not have sufficient resources to train staff in a timely manner. North Carolina created teams of more experienced staff to work with newer universal staff to teach them on the job.
  - In Rhode Island, because of limited time to train, workers were given short trainings and 'cheat sheets' of processes and information to use in their new universal positions.
  - In one Colorado county, business hours were temporarily adjusted to accommodate for the time needed to train staff.
  - In some states, supervisor training had to be unexpectedly increased in several counties to account for the unforeseen need for additional skills for supervisors.
- *Staff and Management Abilities and Willingness to Change:* The willingness of frontline staff and supervisors to implement changes affected implementation, thus clear communication and employee engagement became important for staff at all agency levels. Changes were sometimes met with pushback and resistance and counties had to work to find ways to encourage an agency culture willing to accept these changes.
- *Competing Priorities and Goals across Agencies:* Integrating processes across assistance programs meant having to adjust when agencies inevitably had their own priorities due to competing policies and mandates.
  - In South Carolina, SNAP and Medicaid were run by two separate agencies, requiring staff to wait in two different lines and apply for each benefit separately. During the WSS period, although the backend processes remained separate, they aligned their frontline systems for clients to apply for both benefits at the same time.
  - When Medicaid expansion (Affordable Care Act-ACA) was implemented during the WSS implementation period, states, counties, and offices had to decide how to

respond to the federal mandates and still continue meeting their business process change goals. Some places used ACA as an opportunity to address efficiency and change in programs beyond Medicaid too.

- *Commitment and Dedication of many Actors:* Implementing changes takes commitment from many levels, including state leaders and local officials, which proved to be challenging to maintain. Central workgroups' and outside vendors' commitment were vital too.
- *Funding:* Limited state resources and insufficient staffing were initial motivators for business process changes in nearly all of the WSS states. WSS grants were relatively small but allowed the states to dedicate a full-time staff member to coordinate efforts, support the time of other staff such as data analysts and business process specialists, help pay for training of staff, and contract with business process vendors.
  - Several offices stated that understaffing, even with the business process changes, were still insufficient for implementing the desired changes.

### **POLICY CHANGES**<sup>8</sup>

Several policy changes were made to streamline access to benefits for families. Some policy changes only affected one program while others affected multiple, in order to integrate programs for efficiency. WSS states found dual benefit in making policies more clear and streamlined for families while attempting to make administrative tasks less duplicative for workers.

#### **Single-Program Policy Changes**

States advocated for new policy changes and also adapted to incoming changes in policy that would aid in their goal to make application and re-certification processes more effective for both the client and staff in the following three programs: Medicaid, SNAP, and child care assistance. Below are highlights of the changes of each program.

- Medicaid
  - The Affordable Care Act (ACA) was implemented during the WSS initiative, putting much of the focus of Medicaid changes on implementation of ACA. Federal mandates, guidelines, and timelines were tight and put pressure on states to implement in order to enroll individuals and families into the program.
  - States had to accept applications through multiple formats (mail, online, in-person) which prompted integrative strategies to combine application and eligibility processes with other programs. In many states, integration of Medicaid and SNAP were either expanded or merged fully, combining the front end client application/recertification processes to streamline enrollment, and integrating backend administrative processes to improve efficiencies for workers.

---

<sup>8</sup> Isaacs, J., Katz, M., Kassabian, D. (2016). Changing policies to streamline access to Medicaid, SNAP, and child care assistance: Findings from the Work Support Strategies evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

- SNAP
  - *Reducing the Use of Face-to-Face Interviews*
    - Many states had waivers to allow telephone interviews for applications and recertifications of SNAP, and some states took steps to implement these waivers by focusing in on alternatives made available by improved technologies including electronic verification.
    - In 2012, Idaho obtained approval for telephonic signatures. By doing so, families were able to complete an entire application by phone instead of it being fragmented by phone, in person, and mail.
  - *Streamlining Verification Process and Procedures*
    - States advocated for simplified paperwork to apply for SNAP.
    - Rhode Island allowed clients to self-attest their assets.
    - Illinois eliminated a citizenship form that slowed their processing of the application and adopted a broad-based category form.
    - Idaho and Rhode Island switched to using a standard medical expense amount for elderly people with expenses over \$35 that did not require the proof of receipts.
    - Some states utilized The Work Number, a paid service that allowed workers to verify client's employment for eligibility determination.
  - *Lengthening Certification Periods*
    - Idaho and Illinois took action to lengthen the period of time that an individual is eligible for benefits and their timetables for renewing their benefits. Illinois expanded their 6-month certification period to a 12-month period with reporting at 6 months. The state was also able to continuously apply for and renew the waiver that automatically let them renew hundreds of thousands of SNAP cases for 6 more months, allowing their staff to focus more on processing new applications.
- Child Care Assistance
  - Streamlining Access to Child Care Assistance
    - *Streamlining Verification*
      - Five states streamlined verification of eligibility for subsidies.
      - Rhode Island changed their policies to allow for self-attestation of work hours.
      - Illinois allowed electronic wage deposits to be counted as proof of employment, no longer requiring a letter from the employer.
      - Legislation in Colorado changed documentation to only require one month of pay stubs instead of three.
      - In North Carolina, calculations for income eligibility were standardized across 100 counties that previously had their own rules.



- *Reducing Reporting Requirements*
  - States modified the processes for clients reporting income and changes that might affect the child care subsidy.
- *Lengthening Certification Periods*
  - By giving more time to certification periods, caseloads were reduced for staff and clients had more stability in their benefits.
  - Data showed that by extending the certification period, churn (where families cycle off of and back onto benefits within a short period of time) was reduced and clients were less likely to lose benefits and have to reapply.
- Changes in Eligibility Thresholds, Copayments, and Reimbursement Rates
  - *Eligibility Thresholds*
    - In Rhode Island's statewide pilot, a policy was changed to support families continuing to receive a subsidy if their income rose above the initial income eligibility threshold, so long as it remained below a new threshold. Colorado passed similar changes which allowed families to receive benefits for up to two years after their income rose above their identified threshold.
  - *Copayment Schedules*
    - Some states revised copayment schedules to make it clearer to parents, eligibility workers, and providers how much copay was needed.
  - *Maximum Reimbursement Rates*
    - Colorado passed legislation to create a tiered reimbursement system that provided higher rates to better quality providers.

### **Cross-Program Policy Changes**

As states began the WSS initiative, they looked at the number of people receiving multiple benefits and assessed the gaps in participation, allowing them to see who was eligible for multiple programs not yet enrolled. Policy changes were implemented to better integrate the programs and support the WSS goals. *Table 2* below shows the intended integration goals of combining program policies for each state.

**Table 2: Cross-Program Policy Changes to Increase Program Integration<sup>9</sup>**

	Colorado	Idaho	Illinois	North Carolina	Rhode Island	South Carolina
Combining program application	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Using electronic data for cross-program auto-enrollment			✓			✓
Aligning definitions or requirements	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Aligning timing of renewals or automatic renewals	✓	✓		✓		
Establishing process for cross-program review of new policies		✓		✓		
Creating integrated or combined policy manual				✓	✓	✓

**Source:** Authors' analysis of written documents and interviews with states.

**Note:** States are at different stages in developing, adopting, and implementing these changes; some had developed or begun the policy changes before the Work Support Strategies initiative and some had not yet fully adopted the policies by mid-2015.

- *Combining Program Applications*
  - Every state underwent a process for creating an integrated application so families could apply for multiple benefits at once, specifically Medicaid and SNAP. An obstacle to integrated application was the length of the application and approval of the application by both the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).
  - Colorado was successful in creating a short, eight page integrated application, utilized an online system-Program Eligibility and Application Kit (PEAK), and included the ability to apply for child care assistance as well.
  - Idaho created an integrated application as well as an integrated intake process utilizing technology to facilitate cross-program enrollment.
- *Using Electronic Data for Cross-Program Auto Enrollment*
  - Illinois and South Carolina used electronic SNAP data to automatically enroll and renew clients in Medicaid.
  - In South Carolina, state agencies could automatically enroll children into their Children's Health Insurance Program, matching the data from SNAP, even if eligibility definitions were different. Between September 2012 and June 2013 more than 90,000 children who were on SNAP but not health insurance were enrolled into Medicaid.
- *Aligning Definitions and Requirements across Programs*

<sup>9</sup> Isaacs, J., Katz, M., Kassabian, D. (2016). Changing policies to streamline access to Medicaid, SNAP, and child care assistance: Findings from the Work Support Strategies evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

- Some states worked to align their definitions and requirements across programs to simplify the application and renewal processes to make things easier for families applying to multiple programs.
- Idaho changed their eligibility threshold for child care to match the federal threshold for SNAP.
- In North Carolina, a policy was changed to make families who were eligible for SNAP automatically eligible for a child care subsidy with no additional need for income verification documentation.
- *Aligning Timing of Renewals or Automatic Renewals*
  - Three states aligned recertification dates across programs. Aligning the timing of renewals made it so families could show recertification documentation at the same point in time. This was intended to lower administrative costs and client burden, and lessen the chance of churn in benefits.
- *Establishing Process for Cross-Program Review of New Policies*
  - Idaho and North Carolina formed groups and processes for cross-program review of new policies. An Economic Benefits Policy Governance Board was formed in North Carolina, tasked with streamlining and consolidating policy across multiple programs. The board discussed the best methods for implementation and possible positive or adverse effects of integrated policies. Idaho's review process was less formal, but brought together SNAP implications, implementation, and operational considerations.
- *Creating Integrated or Combined Policy Manuals*
  - Some states attempted to integrate their policy manuals to facilitate cross-referencing of policies, making it easier for workers to serve families receiving benefits from multiple programs and to see how policy changes in one program might affect another.

### **TECHNOLOGY CHANGES<sup>10</sup>**

All WSS states updated their technologies, seeing these as tools to streamline processes and increase efficiencies. Pursuing technology changes met at least one of the following reasons for states:

- Modernize outdated and inflexible eligibility systems
- Minimize burdensome application procedures for clients
- Relieve staffing and caseload pressures
- Integrate work support programs
- Increase availability of data for decision-making
- Meet the provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

---

<sup>10</sup> Loprest, P., Gearing M., Kassabian D. (2016). States' use of technology to improve delivery of benefits: Findings from the Work Support Strategies evaluation." Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Table 3 below outlines the technology changes made by each state. Below the table you can find more details on specific changes with examples by state.

**Table 3: WSS State Technology Changes<sup>11</sup>**

	CO <sup>a</sup>	ID	IL	NC	RI	SC
New eligibility system/rules engine			X	X	X	X
Updated eligibility system/new rules engine	X	X				
New online application/customer portal	X	X	X		X	X
Updated online application/customer portal				X		
New lobby management software	X	X			X	X
New electronic verification interface		X	X			
New document imaging system	X		X			X
New/enhanced data warehouse		X				
New call center			X		X	X
New system for client notices		X				
New child care provider self-service portal	X		X			

Source: Work Support Strategies unpublished program data.

Note: <sup>a</sup>In Colorado, some changes varied by county. For instance, not all counties had new lobby management software.

### Technology Changes Implemented

- *Implemented New and Updated Eligibility Systems*
  - All states either created new systems or updated their existing systems to make them more efficient and integrated.
  - Illinois, Rhode Island, and North Carolina all created new integrated eligibility systems. They were created for the integration of SNAP and Medicaid but in some cases included TANF and child care assistance programs.
- *Created Online Applications and Customer Portals*
  - This was one of most common technological upgrades during the WSS initiative. Since the ACA required an online application process, all states had to assess their ability to provide this. Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, North Carolina, and Rhode Island all expanded, improved, or introduced online applications for benefits (SNAP, TANF, and child care assistance).
  - Some states attached their online applications to a larger client portal where clients could access benefit information.
  - In Illinois, between April 2013 and October 2014, online application went from 18 percent to 49 percent.
  - One barrier to successful implementation were client user errors associated with entering in accurate information online, and the administrative time spent by workers to fix it.
- *Implemented Lobby Management Systems*

<sup>11</sup> Source: *States' Use of Technology to Improve Delivery of Benefits*, page 8.

- Software was introduced in many states that more efficiently allowed for offices to queue transactions based on client needs, which supported better workflow and traffic in the office.
- *Eligibility Information Verification*
  - Utilizing electronic verification systems for social security records, information on citizenship, immigration status, income from federal tax returns, wage data, and employment status all allowed states to move forward in the application process more efficiently, which allowed them to focus more of their time on other parts of the process.
- *Document Imaging Systems*
  - Imaging systems were intended to reduce client's and worker's burdens, and reduce reliance on paper records to make sharing of information and processing more efficient.
- *Call Centers*
  - Illinois and South Carolina introduced call centers to provide access to benefits for those not comfortable using the internet and to reduce office traffic. In South Carolina, a call center was run for the whole state by just one region. In Illinois, the call center technology was integrated with the eligibility system, rules engines, and verification system which captured telephone signatures and improved the timeline of benefit delivery.
- *Technology Assisting Use of Data for Program Management and Decision-making*
  - Idaho created a longitudinal data mart to track client records from different programs and connect the data across time. It also produced federally required reports for Medicaid and SNAP.

### **Lessons Learned from the Development and Implementation of Technology**

- *ACA Influence on Technology Change*
  - The ACA implementation had a large impact on the prioritization and funding of technological changes during the WSS period. The cost allocation waiver provided by the federal government allowed for greater expansion of technologies needed to support the health programs involved in ACA, and integrate them with other work support programs.
- *Establishing Leadership and Vision*
  - Effective leadership was crucial in setting priorities, allocating resources, creating groups to make decisions and implementation plans, and making sure that technological changes contributed to larger goals.
- *Connecting Technology with Business Process Change*
  - Technology and business process change were both tools to obtain the larger goal of reducing client's and worker's burdens which required them both to intertwine and work together. States had to ensure that technology changes served business

process changes and didn't drive them. States agreed that they should determine business process changes and then decide how technology can support them.

- *Training for New Technology*
  - Training needs varied by states, offices, processes, and individuals.
  - Some experienced staff had a harder time adjusting to changing processes and technologies than the newer staff did. More experienced staff had to unlearn old habits to learn the new processes.
  - Training and coaching needed to be continuously implemented over time as changes were rolled out.
  - North Carolina and Illinois both used workers as informal leaders for training and technology testing, supported by regular conference calls, meetings, and specialized training.
- *Using Data for Decision-making*
  - One challenge was determining what data would be needed while also developing technology. Deciding on the necessary data for reporting was difficult while new systems were being implemented.
  - During transition periods between different electronic systems, states found that data would sometimes be split between two systems and could not provide a thorough report on caseloads as a whole.

## EVALUATION

The evaluation process, led by the Urban Institute, took place over the course of the entire initiative, with data collected from hundreds of individual and group interviews completed during annual site visits, as well as reviews of planning documents, various agency reports, reports from secondary sources, data tracked by agencies, client experience surveys and focus groups.

### **Monitoring and Measuring Outcomes of Business Process Changes<sup>12</sup>**

- States' intention with WSS was to improve client access to benefits and retention, reduce errors, improve customer service, improve staff morale, and lead to long-term administrative cost efficiencies. Some outcome measurements included:
  - Increases in percentage of new applications that are processed within federally mandated timeframes.
  - Reductions in the number of average days between application and benefit availability.
  - Increases in same-day service delivery.
  - Improvements to staff morale.
  - Increases in the number of positive client experiences.

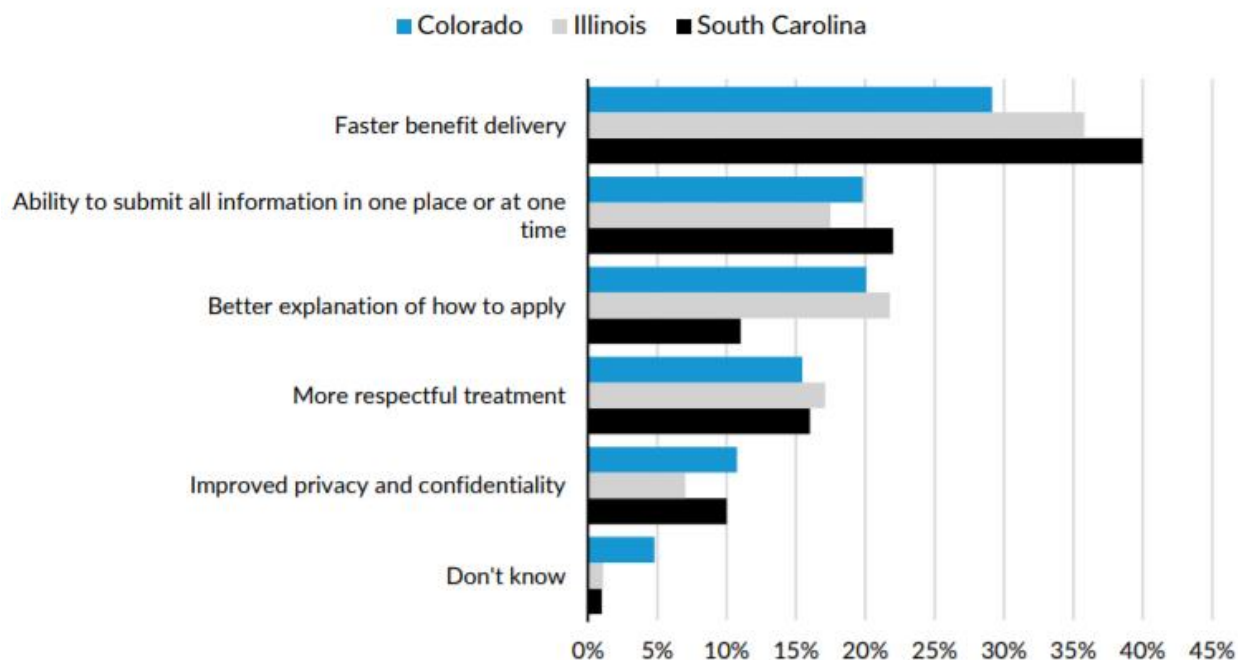
---

<sup>12</sup> Hahn, H., Amin, Kassabian, D., Gearing, M. (2016). Improving business processes for delivering work supports for low-income families: Findings from the work support strategies evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

- *Efficiency Improvements in Application Processing*
  - Colorado, Illinois, Idaho, and Rhode Island, who all tracked same-day service (applicants who received benefit determination on the same day they applied) saw dramatic improvements.
    - Rhode Island went from 10 percent of SNAP applicants receiving same-day service in mid-2011 to 30 percent in early 2015.
    - In Colorado, the statewide share of non-expedited SNAP same-day applicants went from 12 percent in January 2013 to 24 percent in July 2015 (including expedited cases, 33 percent received same-day service).
    - Idaho already had 70 percent of applicants receiving same-day service for SNAP before WSS began but was able to increase to 74 percent by the end of the initiative.
  - The length of time for eligibility determination decreased in several states. However, some states saw fluctuations in the amount of time needed as the roll out of changes were implemented. Also, as states worked through caseload backlog, processing times slowed as well.
    - In South Carolina, SNAP applicants receiving an eligibility determination within two weeks went from 21 percent in mid-2012, to 40 percent in mid-2015. On average, clients received eligibility determination in 17 days in mid-2015, compared to 21 days in mid-2011.
    - Illinois' processing time went from 16 days to 13 days over the same time period as South Carolina, although within the state, processing time initially worsened as they struggled with changes, but eventually saw improvement.
    - Rhode Island's processing time went from 10 days in mid-2011 to 5 days in early-2015.
    - Idaho, with the fastest processing time, started at 2.4 days in early-2010, and improved to 1.7 days in early-2015.
  - The percentage of cases meeting federal requirements for timelines did not change consistently across states.
- *Program Integrity and Accuracy*: While WSS states began the initiative with an average SNAP error rate below national average, collectively they ended worse than average. States had to closely monitor their worker errors as some started to approach an alarming rate. The worse rates occurred in the middle of the WSS period but were followed by improvements.
- *Client Experiences*: States utilized client experience surveys, client focus groups, and interviews with staff and stakeholders to gather client perspectives. Data showed overall improved client experience, with some lingering issues.
  - Some clients reported that with increased efficiency came increased depersonalization of service.

- Many positive experiences were reported. Chart 1 below shows client experience survey results in regard to the most important service improvement related to timeliness and process for SNAP applications with children

**Chart 1: Most Important Service Improvement Related to Timeliness and Process, per SNAP Applicant Survey<sup>13</sup>**



**Source:** Client experience surveys of SNAP applicants with children in Colorado, Illinois, and South Carolina.

**Notes:** The analysis is based on 1,212 applicants in Colorado, 1,013 in Illinois, and 400 in South Carolina. Illinois responses are weighted to adjust for oversampling of expedited applicants. See appendix B for more information on survey methods.

- **Staff Morale:** While efficiency improvements were reported by staff, staff morale suffered in some instances. Workers expressed frustration in moving from case-based to task-based cases, as well as understaffing and limited training. Other staff reported that the switch to universal staff led to more manageable workloads and increased work satisfaction.

### **Benefit Delivery Efficiencies and Cost-Saving**

The following section reviews the outcomes associated with benefit delivery efficiencies, including potential cost-saving benefits to both clients and agencies.

<sup>13</sup> Isaacs, J., Katz, M., and Amin, R. (2016). Improving the efficiency of benefit delivery: Outcomes from the Work Support Strategies evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/85851/improving-the-efficiency-of-benefit\\_delivery\\_report\\_2.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/85851/improving-the-efficiency-of-benefit_delivery_report_2.pdf);

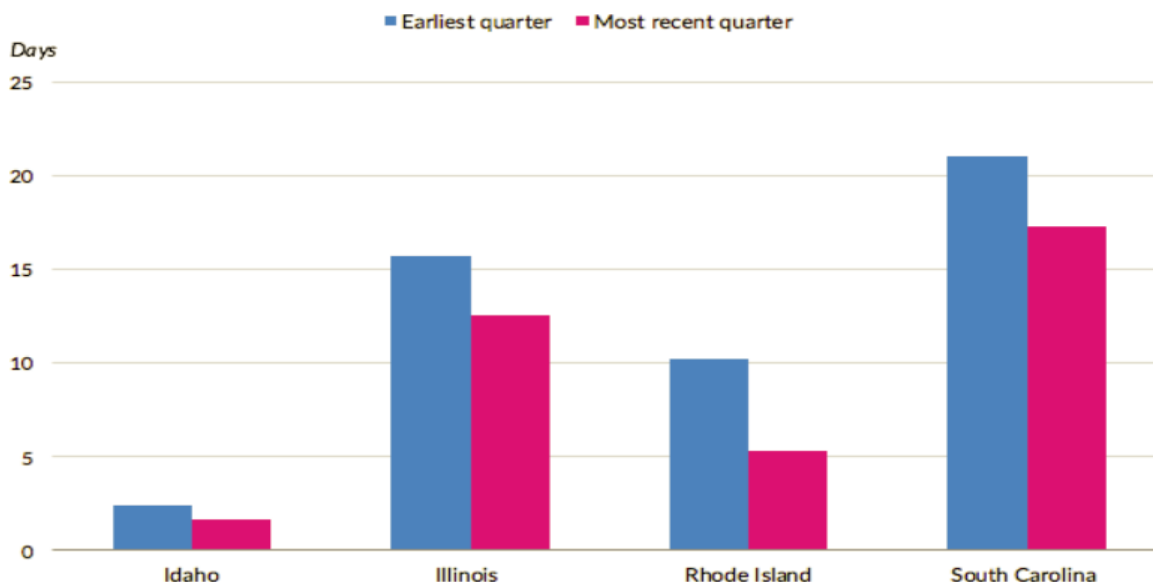


*Benefit Delivery*<sup>14</sup>

By the end of the WSS initiative, states made progress in the following areas:

- *Speeding up Benefit Delivery After Application*
  - States wanted to speed up benefit delivery in order to meet federal requirements, provide better customer service (in client surveys, ‘receiving benefits sooner’ was the most frequent request for customer service improvements), and make more efficient use of worker’s time.
  - Most states were able to issue benefits in fewer days. Idaho, Illinois, Rhode Island, and South Carolina were able to lower their state’s average number of days needed to process SNAP applications for clients to receive benefits. See *Chart 2* below for a breakdown of how the average number of days for these four states decreased following the WSS initiative.
  - Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, and Rhode Island were all able to increase the number of their SNAP applications that were processed on the same day. See *Chart 3* for more information.

**Chart 2: Average Days Needed to Process SNAP Applications**

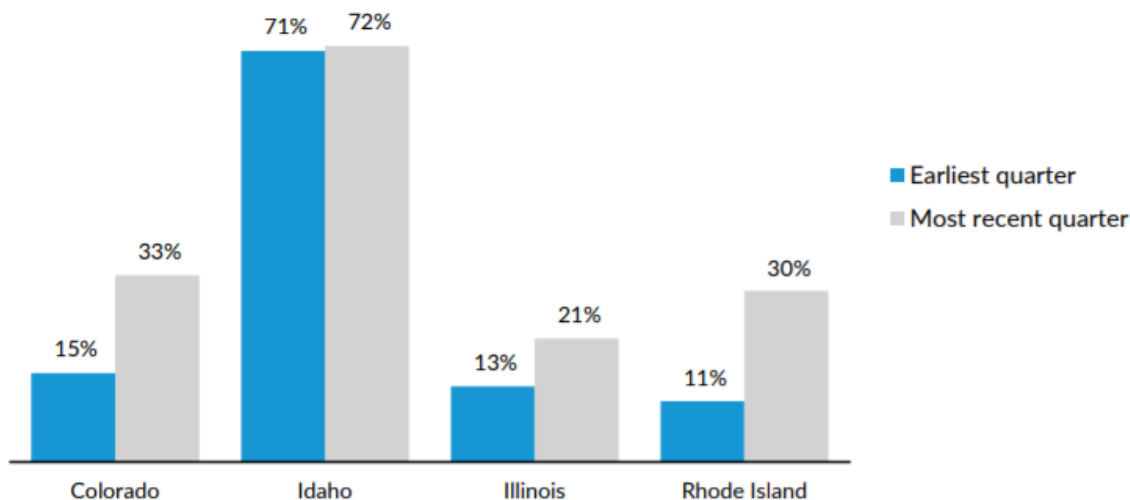


Source: Isaacs, Katz, and Amin. 2016. *Improving the Efficiency of Benefit Delivery: Report on Outcomes from the Work Support Strategies Evaluation*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.  
 Notes: Earliest quarter refers to January–March 2010 for Idaho, May–June 2012 for Illinois, June 2011 only for Rhode Island, and October–December 2011 for South Carolina. Most recent quarters are August–October 2015 for Idaho, January–March 2015 for Illinois, February–April 2015 for Rhode Island, and May–July 2015 for South Carolina.  
 SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

URBAN INSTITUTE

<sup>14</sup> Isaacs, J., Katz, M., and Amin, R. (2016). *Improving the efficiency of benefit delivery: Outcomes from the Work Support Strategies evaluation*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.; Isaacs, J., Hahn, H. (2016). *Five recent improvements to help families access work support benefits*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

**Chart 3: SNAP Applications Processed Same Day**



- **Reducing Churn at Time of Renewal**
  - States reduced some churn (where families cycle off of and back onto benefits within a short period of time) and while it was difficult to document, two states were able to provide strong data and reduce churn in at least one program and all states saw enough data from either their own state or others to see the value of improving their renewal process so applicants did not have to reapply with a new application.
    - In a research study conducted, it was estimated to cost an average of \$82-\$133 additional administrative dollars for each family that cycled off of SNAP and had to reapply in 2011. The study estimated that it took double or triple the time to process an initial SNAP application than to process a redetermination.<sup>15</sup>
    - Addressing churn involved states needing to:
      - Place a priority on measuring and understanding types of churn:
        - *Renewal churn*- tracking how many participants facing renewal notices have case closure followed up reapplications
        - *Churn among applicants*-tracking how many applicants had previously closed cases
        - *Annual churn*- tracking how many household had gaps in benefits in a year

<sup>15</sup> Mills, G., Vericker, T., Koball, H., Lippold, K., Wheaton, L., and Elkin, S. (2014). Understanding the rates, causes, and costs of churning in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) final report. Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture.

- Simplify the renewal process
- Change policies to reduce renewal risk points
  - Lobbies became less crowded with shorter wait times in many states.
- Families who were eligible for both SNAP and Medicaid/CHIP were more likely to participate in both programs.
- See *Cost-Savings* below for costs associated with reducing churn.

*Cost-Savings*<sup>16</sup>

- Cost-savings were not a main goal of the WSS initiative for states, but served as an additional outcome that the states found either through a savings in dollars or in time as they shifted their processes to more efficient tasks. Potential savings were found in the three overall areas: *reducing churn, using electronic data to improve cross-program enrollment, and reducing lobby wait times and the number of trips clients make to offices.* Table 4 below outlines potential savings that states may encounter in regards to the outcomes of WSS.

**Table 4: Potential Savings Associated with WSS Outcomes**<sup>17</sup>

Outcome	Savings/costs to agencies	Savings/costs to clients
Faster benefit delivery	Fewer phone calls/visits from clients checking on application status. Less time spent managing and reworking pending cases.	Avoidance of material hardship. Less anxiety about benefit receipt.
Reducing churn	Reduced case processing costs, calculated as the difference between new applications and renewals. Increase in benefit costs during what otherwise might be gap months.	Avoidance of gaps in benefit coverage. Avoidance of material hardship. Less anxiety about benefit redetermination. Reduced time and expense of doing a new application (rather than a renewal).
Reducing client wait and worker service time	Fewer interruptions to caseworkers. Less worker time spent on case processing. Costs of new technology systems, including lobby management systems. Costs of contracts with business process consultants. Costs of training.	Less time spent waiting in line and making multiple visits. Avoidance of lost wages during office visits. Reduced transportation costs associated with office visits.
Using electronic data to improve cross-program enrollment <sup>b</sup>	Less worker time spent on case processing. Benefit costs associated with higher participation rates.	Value of receiving full package of benefits. Reduced time and expense associated with application or renewal to multiple programs.

- *Reducing Churn*
  - An approximation of Idaho’s SNAP budget found a \$53,000 or .05 percent of total SNAP administration funding saved. Recertification costs the agency less time and money than an initial application, thus encouraging processes that advocate for recertification were found to be a cost-saving measure.

<sup>16</sup> Isaacs, Julia B., Michael Katz, and Ria Amin. (2016) Improving the efficiency of benefit delivery: Outcomes from the Work Support Strategies evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

<sup>17</sup> Source: *Improve the Efficiency of Benefit Delivery*, page 88

- A rough estimate showed that a client gained about \$195 in benefits for every instance that churn was avoided.
- See *Table 5* below for a breakdown of the above costs.

**Table 5: Estimated Costs and Savings to Agencies and Clients: Reducing SNAP Churn in Idaho<sup>18</sup>**

	Churn of 30 days or less	Churn of 31- 90 days	Churn total
<b>Reduction in SNAP churn</b>			
Procedural churn incidence in state fiscal year 2012	1.86%	0.66%	2.41%
Procedural churn incidence in state fiscal year 2015	1.36%	0.55%	1.80%
Reduction in procedural churn incidence	0.50%	0.11%	0.61%
Active monthly SNAP caseload in 2015			85,857
Number of cases avoiding churn in 2015 (per month)	429	97	526
<b>Administrative savings</b>			
Number of cases avoiding new applications (per month)	--	97	
Administrative savings per case <sup>a</sup>	--	\$46	
Annual administrative savings	--	\$53,500	\$53,500
Annual household certification costs <sup>b</sup>			\$98.1 million
Savings as percentage of household certification costs			0.5%
<b>Continuation of benefits (savings to clients and costs to government)</b>			
Number of cases avoiding churn in 2015 (per month)	429	97	
Average months of benefit gap avoided <sup>c</sup>	0.5	1.9	
Average benefit loss avoided <sup>d</sup>	\$136	\$416	\$195
Annual benefit loss avoided	\$700,000	\$600,000	\$1,300,000
Total SNAP benefits in Idaho in state fiscal year 2015			\$277,300,000
Continued benefits as percentage of benefits			0.5%

**Sources:** Estimates based on churn data provided by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. Administrative savings per case in Idaho estimated in Mills and colleagues (2014). Average SNAP benefits in Idaho are from the Food and Nutrition Service National Data Bank, version 8.2 public use.

**Notes:** Estimates are for state fiscal year 2015 (July 2014–June 2015).

<sup>a</sup> Administrative savings per month assume a 2:1 ratio between costs for an initial application and a recertification, as explained in text and in Mills and colleagues (2014). Total administrative savings of \$53,500 are the product of 97 cases per month, \$46 per case, and 12 months per year, rounded.

<sup>b</sup> See table 4.1.

<sup>c</sup> The estimate of 1.9 months is a weighted average of 1.5 months for cases open 1 to 2 months (61 percent) and 2.5 months for those open 2 to 3 months (39 percent).

<sup>d</sup> Average benefit loss assumes an average monthly household benefit of \$272 in Idaho. Total benefit losses are the product of cases per month, average benefit loss, and 12 months per year, rounded.

- *Using Electronic Data to Improve Cross-Program Enrollment*
  - Using SNAP records to automate the processing of Medicaid eligibility showed promising results for cost-saving measures. In South Carolina, it was estimated that they had a \$1.6 million dollar yearly savings in administrative costs to use their Express Lane Eligibility (ELE) software to enroll uninsured children in Medicaid based on their SNAP records. This offset some of their \$538,000 in start-up costs in the IT programming of this cross-program collaboration.

<sup>18</sup> Source: *Improve the Efficiency of Benefit Delivery*, page 97

- It was estimated that though the use of ELE, there was a time savings of 20-30 minutes per case.
- More data on savings associated with cross-program enrollment can be found in *Table 6* below.

**Table 6: Estimated Costs and Savings to Agencies and Clients: Using SNAP Records to Renew or Enroll Clients in Medicaid in South Carolina and Illinois<sup>19</sup>**

	<b>Savings and costs to agencies</b>	<b>Savings and costs to clients</b>
Using SNAP records to automatically renew and automatically enroll new children into Medicaid under Express Lane Eligibility (ELE) in South Carolina	<p><b>Reduction in staff processing times and costs.</b> A reduction of 20<sup>a</sup> or 25 minutes<sup>b</sup> per renewal case that otherwise would reapply within 30 days and 90 minutes<sup>b</sup> for new applications and late renewals that would have been required to submit new applications. Estimated annual savings of \$1.6 million across 120,000 renewals and 110,000 new enrollments.<sup>b</sup></p> <p><b>Start-up costs</b> of \$538,000, primarily due to IT programming.<sup>b</sup></p> <p><b>Cost of health care coverage</b> for eligible uninsured children. The state did not expect much effect on benefits for renewals (most children who lose eligibility return within 90 days and receive retroactive eligibility) but estimated the legislature needed to increase funding by \$40 million for the state share of benefits to new enrollees under ELE.<sup>c</sup> Multivariate analysis of ELE implementation in eight states (including South Carolina) suggests average Medicaid participation increased about 6 percent.<sup>b</sup></p>	<p><b>Reduced time and expense</b> of renewing or applying through conventional means.</p> <p><b>Fewer days to wait for approval</b> of coverage.</p> <p><b>Reduction in gaps in health coverage due to reduced churn.</b> Although most children who lose coverage at renewal would get retroactive eligibility (if they reapply within 90 days), families may forgo health care during gaps in eligibility.<sup>b</sup></p> <p><b>New insurance coverage</b> for eligible uninsured children. Multivariate analysis of ELE implementation in eight states (including South Carolina) suggests average Medicaid participation increased about 6 percent.<sup>b</sup></p>
Using SNAP records to enroll nonelderly individuals into Medicaid under Strategy 3 in Illinois	<p><b>Reduction in staff processing times</b> from 30 minutes to 3 minutes.<sup>d</sup></p> <p><b>Start-up costs</b> of an estimated 870 hours for state IT staff to build a new interface and prepare mailings and \$60,000 for one-time mailing and hours in training (one hour for all supervisors, who then trained staff).<sup>d</sup></p> <p><b>Cost of health care coverage</b> for eligible uninsured individuals. However, many may have entered through the marketplace eventually anyway.</p>	<p><b>Reduced time and expense</b> of applying for coverage through Medicaid or the marketplace.</p> <p><b>Fewer days waiting for approval</b> of coverage.</p> <p><b>New insurance coverage</b> for eligible uninsured individuals (although many may have eventually entered through the marketplace).</p>

**Sources:** Urban Institute, using data from Supra (2011), Hoag and colleagues (2013), interviews with state officials conducted by the WSS evaluation team, and Hagan and Kishore (2014).

- *Reducing Lobby Wait Times and the Number of Trips Clients Made to Offices*
  - An estimate of the cost per applicant to SNAP in Illinois showed that, taking into account transportation expenses, value of time spent in offices, reduction in wait time of in-person applications, and the dollar amount of minimum wage, costs dropped from \$32.21 to \$27.52 per person.
  - *Table 7* and *8* below show a breakdown of the estimated savings of shorter wait times and fewer office visits for SNAP applicants.

<sup>19</sup> Source: *Improve the Efficiency of Benefit Delivery*, page 99

**Table 7: Estimated Savings to Clients: Shorter Wait Times and Fewer Office Visits for SNAP Applicants in Illinois<sup>20</sup>**

	September 2014	March 2015	Savings
<b>Less time spent on in-person applications</b>			
Minutes waiting when applying in person	53	39	14
Assumed minutes traveling when applying in person	75	75	0
Percentage of applicants applying in person	61%	55%	
Combined wait and travel time averaged over all applicants	78	63	15
Opportunity cost of initial application <sup>a</sup>	\$10.69	\$8.64	\$2.05
<b>Less time spent on follow-up visits</b>			
Number of follow-up visits	0.92	0.81	0.12
<i>Assumed total minutes per visit</i>	115	115	
Opportunity cost <sup>a</sup>	\$14.59	\$12.77	\$1.83
<b>Lower travel costs</b>			
Total number of office visits	1.54	1.36	0.18
Travel costs <sup>b</sup>	\$6.93	\$6.11	\$0.82
<b>Total wait and travel time and costs</b>	<b>\$32.21</b>	<b>\$27.52</b>	<b>\$4.69</b>

**Source:** Authors' estimates based on data collected through client experience surveys of SNAP applicants with children in Illinois.

**Notes:** Assumptions (noted in italics) are not based on survey data but represent the authors' assumptions. The estimated travel time of 75 minutes assumes a 30–45 minute trip each way. The total 115 minutes per follow-up visit assumes 75 minutes in travel time and 30 minutes in wait and service time (assuming some clients are just dropping off documents and others are waiting to see a worker).

<sup>a</sup> Opportunity cost calculations are based on the \$8.25 minimum wage in Illinois.

<sup>b</sup> Travel cost calculations are based on a \$4.50 round-trip fare on a Chicago bus or train.

**Table 8: Estimated Savings from Shorter Lobby Wait Times<sup>21</sup>**

	<u>Wait Time in Minutes</u>			State minimum wage	Opportunity cost savings per applicant
	Early	Late	Change		
Illinois (in-person SNAP applications)	53	39	-14	\$8.25	\$1.93
Boise, Idaho (all transactions)	26	15	-11	\$7.25	\$1.33
Providence, Rhode Island (in-person applications)	94	62	-32	\$9.60	\$5.12
Other Rhode Island offices (in-person applications)	30	30	0	\$9.60	\$0

**Sources:** Authors' analysis of Excel and Q-Flow data provided by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, survey data collected from SNAP applicants in Illinois, and PathOS data provided by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services.

**Notes:** Illinois data compare SNAP clients applying in person in September 2014 to those applying in March 2015. Idaho data compare March through mid-June 2013 with mid-June 2014 through August 2015. Rhode Island data compare August–October 2014 with June–August 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Source: *Improve the Efficiency of Benefit Delivery*, page 103

<sup>21</sup> Source: *Improve the Efficiency of Benefit Delivery*, page 102

### **Additional Research**

This report has provided a summary of the highlights of the Work Support Strategies initiative. For more information regarding each state's efforts, please see Appendix A where reports detail each state's early lessons of implementation. Also see <https://www.urban.org/work-support-strategies> for a comprehensive list of resources about the WSS initiative.

## **REFERENCES**

- Hahn, H. (2016). Finding from the Work Support Strategies evaluation: Streamlining access, strengthening families. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/81921/2000820-Findings-from-the-Work-Support-Strategies-Evaluation-Streamlining-Access-Strengthening-Families.pdf>
- Hahn, H., Amin, R., Kassabian, D., Gearing, M. (2016). Improving business processes for delivering work supports for low-income families: Findings from the Work Support Strategies evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/78851/2000670-Improving-Business-Processes-for-Delivering-Work-Supports-for-Low-Income-Families-Findings-from-the-Work-Support-Strategies-Evaluation.pdf>
- Hahn, H., Gearing, M., Katz, M., Amin, R. (2015). Observations of leaders driving changes in State government: Leadership tools and lessons from two work support strategy states. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/39041/2000074-Observations-of-Leaders-Driving-Changes-in-State-Government.pdf>
- Hahn, H., Isaacs, J., Rohacek, M. (2016). Context on the six Work Support Strategies states: Supplement to WSS evaluation publications. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/78841/2000669-Context-on-the-Six-Work-Support-Strategies-States-Supplement-to-WSS-Evaluation-Publications.pdf>
- Isaacs, J., Katz, M., and Amin, R. (2016). Improving the efficiency of benefit delivery: Outcomes from the Work Support Strategies evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/85851/improving-the-efficiency-of-benefit-delivery-report-2.pdf>
- Isaacs, J., Katz, M., and Kassabian, D. (2016). Changing policies to streamline access to Medicaid, SNAP, and child care assistance: Findings from the Work Support Strategies evaluation. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/78846/2000668-Changing-Policies-to-Streamline-Access-to-Medicaid-SNAP-and-Child-Care-Assistance-Findings-from-the-Work-Support-Strategies-Evaluation.pdf>
- Loprest, P., Gearing M., Kassabian D. (2016). States' use of technology to improve delivery of



benefits: Findings from the Work Support Strategies evaluation.” Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/78856/2000671-States'-Use-of-Technology-to-Improve-Delivery-of-Benefits-Findings-from-the-Work-Support-Strategies-Evaluation.pdf>

Mills, G., Vericker, T, Koball, H, Lippold, R, Wheaton, L., Elkin, S. 2014. Understanding the rates, causes, and costs of churning in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) final report. Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture. Retrieved from <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/SNAPChurning.pdf>

## **APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES BY STATE**

For more information, each state has a report on the early lessons (first year) of implementation and can be found below.

### **Colorado**

Loprest, P., Giesen, L. (2013) Early lessons from the Work Support Strategies initiative: Colorado. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/early-lessons-work-support-strategies-initiative-colorado>

### **Idaho**

Rohacek, M. (2013) Early lessons from the Work Support Strategies initiative: Idaho. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/early-lessons-work-support-strategies-initiative-idaho>

### **Illinois**

Hahn, H., Golden, O., Compton, J. (2013) Early lessons from the Work Support Strategies initiative: Illinois. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/early-lessons-work-support-strategies-initiative-illinois>

### **North Carolina**

Loprest, P., Giesen, L. (2013) Early lessons from the Work Support Strategies initiative: North Carolina. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/early-lessons-work-support-strategies-initiative-north-carolina>

### **Rhode Island**

Hahn, H., Kassabian, D. (2013) Early lessons from the Work Support Strategies initiative: Rhode Island. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/early-lessons-work-support-strategies-initiative-rhode-island>

### **South Carolina**

Courtot, B., (2013) Early lessons from the Work Support Strategies initiative: South Carolina. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/early-lessons-work-support-strategies-initiative-south-carolina>