

Work Support
Strategies:
Streamlining Access,
Strengthening Families



Early Lessons from the Work Support Strategies Initiative: Idaho

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After experiences in the early 2000s with high state error rates in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that led to federal sanctions, Idaho made major progress in the middle and later part of the decade, streamlining its service delivery system and overhauling outdated technology. In state executives' view, these reforms positioned Idaho as a national leader in delivering cost-effective, integrated health and human services for families so they can become self-reliant. This vision was consistent with Idaho's conservative culture, which emphasizes efficient, small government and personal responsibility.

At the same time, budget cuts were forcing staffing reductions and office closures, and Idaho's caseloads (particularly for SNAP) were growing at the highest rates in the country. Seeking support for its ongoing systems improvements in the challenging context of the Great Recession, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) took the unusual step of pursuing its first grant opportunity in 30 years. The objectives of the Work Support Strategies (WSS) grant fit with the department's vision, goals, and activities, and this alignment was a primary factor in the decision to apply.

In 2011, IDHW was awarded a WSS grant to continue the Division of Welfare's efforts. This multiyear initiative, funded by private philanthropy, offered financial and other resources to select states to test and implement more effective and integrated approaches to delivering key work supports, including health coverage, nutrition benefits, and child care subsidies. Simplifying and modernizing these

Work Support Strategies

Work Support Strategies (WSS) is a multiyear initiative to simplify the process of getting work support benefits. Working directly with selected states, WSS seeks to

- improve the health and well-being of low-income families by increasing enrollment in work support programs;
- deliver benefits more effectively and efficiently, reducing administrative burdens on states as well as clients; and
- evaluate the impact of these streamlined approaches, disseminate lessons learned, and inform state and federal policies.

WSS focuses on three work support programs: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and child care subsidies through the Child Care and Development Block Grant. Participating states may choose to add other programs, and most have done so.

In fall 2010, WSS invited states to apply for one-year planning grants, with the opportunity to continue to a three-year implementation phase. Twenty-seven states submitted applications, and nine were competitively selected: Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, and South Carolina. During the planning phase, the selected states received \$250,000, expert technical assistance, and peer support from other states. With these resources, the grantees performed intensive diagnostic self-assessments, explored business process strategies, established leadership structures, and developed data-driven action plans that address policy and practice changes.

This report is one of 10 (one on each state, plus a cross-cutting report) describing state activities during the planning year.

processes can help improve the health and well-being of low-income families, save states money, and improve overall efficiency.

Idaho's Goals for the Planning Year

IDHW's goals for the planning year built directly on the department's previous efforts to improve Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP). The main goals included the following:

- Address processes and procedures that challenge clients' ability to enroll in and retain key work supports, and position IDHW to effectively and efficiently address new challenges expected with new federal health care requirements.
- Improve child care eligibility policies along with ICCP business processes and technology by building on successes in SNAP, Medicaid, and cash assistance programs.
- Better integrate Idaho's work support programs (including SNAP, Medicaid, and ICCP) to streamline benefit renewal for eligible families and, thus, to support improved outcomes for these families.
- Increase the productivity of the department's eligibility workforce by further implementing a universal workforce service delivery model.

Work Support Programs Included in Idaho's Planning Year

SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Medicaid

ICCP: Idaho Child Care Program

State Background

Seven divisions of the Department of Health and Welfare managed nearly all Idaho's public health and human service benefit programs. The Division of Welfare oversaw Idaho's self-reliance programs, including child support and cash assistance such as SNAP, child care assistance through the ICCP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled. The Division of Welfare also determined Medicaid eligibility, but other aspects of the program were the responsibility of the Division of Medicaid. The Division of

A Quick Glance at Idaho

Population (in thousands): 1,567

Share of population living below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) (in 2011):^a 40.4%

Unemployment rate (in September 2012):^b 6.8%

Share of eligibles participating in SNAP (in 2010):^c all individuals, 81%; working poor, 78%

Share of eligible children participating in Medicaid/CHIP (in 2010):^d 79.9%

State Medicaid upper income eligibility limit as % of FPL:^e Children, 133%; Working parents, 37%

Programs state or county administered? State

Number of DHS service regions: 7

Lead WSS agency: Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW)

SNAP governance: IDHW > Division of Welfare > SNAP

Medicaid governance: IDHW > Medicaid, Behavioral Health and Managed Care Services > Division of Medicaid

Child care governance: IDHW > Division of Welfare > Idaho Child Care Program

Sources: ^a U.S. Census Bureau (2011 estimates); ^b Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012); ^c Cunningham (2012); ^d Kenney et al. (2012); ^e Kaiser Family Foundation (2013).

Welfare's self-reliance programs were overseen by a core team in the state-level central business office and administered through 19 IDHW field offices and 4 dedicated processing units that house call center, central mail, child care eligibility processing, Medicaid redetermination, and other statewide teams.

Amid widespread criticism of IDHW and its operations, Interim Governor Jim Risch appointed Richard Armstrong as director of the department in 2006. Armstrong came from the private sector, most recently serving as senior vice president of sales and marketing for Blue Cross of Idaho. He was reappointed by Governor "Butch" Otter, who was elected in November of that year. When Armstrong entered the cabinet, SNAP error rates were so high that the state had been sanctioned by the USDA. Middle managers and line staff had little confidence in executive leadership. As one IDHW leader put it, "[They] were failing the citizens of Idaho." Armstrong said that his first week in office showed him what he was up against: "USDA delivered a letter that said we owed them \$265,000 for abysmal performance under SNAP...Idaho was 51st in the nation....I wanted to better serve Idahoans."

Consequently, the department began a major effort to redesign and improve its self-reliance delivery system by improving efficiency and effectiveness while respecting Idaho's historical emphasis on personal responsibility rather than a large, generous safety net. Armstrong and the IDHW team focused on improving operational procedures in local offices and creating a universal workforce. To cope with the pressure of increasing caseloads, IDHW moved to an operational model that included a mix of field offices and centralized processing units.

Under the universal workforce model, self-reliance specialists in field offices managed every aspect of eligibility determination for SNAP, Medicaid, and TANF, instead of specializing in one program. Self-reliance specialists also collected child care eligibility information, which was forwarded to a centralized processing unit for eligibility determination. This operational model was central to Idaho's ongoing efforts to further increase the efficiency of service delivery and better meet the needs of low-income working families. Entering WSS, the state was considering options for taking the vision even further.

Idaho's universal workforce transition was supported by the 2009 replacement of the state's legacy data system with a new case management system, the Idaho Benefit Eligibility System (IBES). IBES included electronic case record functionality, which facilitated the sharing of work across the state. It also incorporated a data warehouse, which increased the department's capacity to track and analyze data for program monitoring and management.

In 2011–12, Idaho had a single-party government, with a Republican governor elected to his second term in 2010 and strong Republican majorities in both houses of the legislature. The state's families and economy were still experiencing the effects of the recession, which began later and had a larger impact in Idaho than in many other states. The WSS team was overseen by Russ Barron, administrator of the Division of Welfare. Other team leaders included the division's two deputy administrators, Greg Kunz and Lori Wolff, and a project manager. Because WSS was largely "jet fuel" poured onto the division's ongoing planning and management efforts, the WSS team also included all members of the benefits leadership team, which included bureau chiefs for automation, field operations, and compliance and support; and managers of information management, SNAP/TANF policy, Medicaid policy, child care policy,

and training. Idaho's WSS leaders also viewed IDHW executive leadership, field operations managers, and community stakeholders and advocates as critical contributors.

Five themes were important to Idaho's WSS planning year: using data and rapid action to drive large-scale change; creating the next "stretch" vision; putting operational considerations front and center; changing culture and reaching the frontline workforce; and strengthening relationships with external stakeholders.

Using Data and Rapid Action to Drive Large-Scale Change

"We didn't spend a full year talking and researching [plans for further program integration].... We like quick wins and quick fails because we can quickly recover."

—WSS leadership team member

"It's like flying a plane. You can fly by gut...or by instrumentation...Old case management was...going on gut. Today, the data is the way we fly."

—WSS leadership team member

Going into the planning year, Idaho's approach to change was already well defined. It emphasized working toward a larger vision through numerous and frequent small-scale changes. These incremental changes would be followed by data analysis and reflection to plan future activities and course corrections (including to the long-term vision).

Idaho's philosophy was that planning huge initiatives on multiyear timelines was risky because by the time the initiative was rolled out, needs and resources were likely different; also, as the size of an initiative grew, so did the cost of failure. The WSS team felt strongly that the best lessons and guidance for effective next steps would emerge by observing what worked and did not work when undertaking incremental change. The division has operationalized this management philosophy by adopting an Agile/SCRUM development approach. This lean management technique centers on making changes in short sprints with a multidisciplinary team comprising product owners (representatives from the "business," or the service delivery and/or policy side), developers, quality assurance personnel (representatives from the technology side), and a scrum master who facilitates and coordinates the actions of the team and removes any

barriers to progress. The Agile/SCRUM development cycle generally includes planning, development, testing, and release phases within a two-to-four week sprint.

Idaho's approach to change also focused intensely on data, which was vital for guiding both day-to-day program management and longer-term program planning. All the layers of IDHW—from top management to the field—relied on data. Even as the WSS work began, state managers assessed case management data daily to prioritize and allocate work. “We don’t have to worry about backlogs, and we pay attention every day to make sure we don’t have to worry,” explained one member of the division’s leadership team. “That comes from tracking and performance management and data.” The state was “systematic” in addressing irregular workflow.

Data were equally crucial for operations staff. In the field, managers used data to identify changes in case management trends and to make appropriate adjustments. “The [field operations] managers die without their reports now,” said one state staff member. “They know when there is a problem immediately.” Field operations managers said that data had “made a world of difference in how [they] manage [their] work.”

Early in the planning year, Idaho worked closely with the national WSS technical assistance team to generate data on cross-program participation and “churn.” Churn refers to families losing benefits and then reapplying a short time later; it is most often a concern when administrative hiccups, rather than actual changes in eligibility status, cause the churning. The IDHW leadership team identified new measures of churn deliberately and collaboratively, working together to reach a set of common definitions related to the measures.

Once the team worked through the conceptual challenges of defining measures and the technical challenges of obtaining this new information from the data systems, it realized it had generated some extremely powerful and useful evidence to guide its planning efforts. Among its findings:

- 60 percent of families receiving SNAP whose cases were closed at the end of November 2010 for failure to complete the reevaluation process reapplied within 90 days.
- One-third of application volume could be eliminated by improving the reevaluation process to minimize churn.

- 25 percent of reevaluations completed every month were unnecessarily touched multiple times.

“The churn data helped us see how much work we were creating for ourselves,” a WSS team member explained. “We patted ourselves on the back on how well we were doing on applications but were shocked to see that 30 percent of applications were from churn.”

With a strong culture of acting on a problem once identified, Idaho staff used those findings to shape the redesign of their reevaluation process. Among the major changes, they aligned redetermination periods across programs, prepopulated redetermination forms with information already available to the agency, and worked toward their goal to “touch families” and case files only once when making eligibility determinations (see the text box for more details). IDHW implemented the reevaluation redesign through “monthly sprints,” following the Agile/SCRUM model. Centered around particular business process or technology changes, sprints include final planning, testing, design, and release, typically on a one-month time frame.

The division also invested time and resources in building data capacity over the WSS planning year. Staff generated case management metrics for child care analogous to the data available for SNAP and Medicaid. They designed and carried out analyses to inform planning for future federal requirements related to health assistance. That work included, for example, estimating the expected volume of applicants to consider how the increase might influence

Development and Early Implementation of Reevaluation Redesign

Although redesigning the reevaluation process across work support programs was part of Idaho’s original plans for the WSS initiative, new and more detailed evidence about churn further motivated and informed the state’s actions. The WSS leadership team approached the redesign by thinking about what benefit reevaluation should look like from a family’s perspective. The team ultimately envisioned a family reapplying for all programs at one time.

Based on that vision, the Division of Welfare implemented a series of changes to prepare for a major revision of business processes in September 2011. It designed and implemented a single application form for SNAP, Medicaid, child care, and other key programs; began prepopulating the reevaluation form with client information; and aligned reevaluation dates so customers (even those receiving multiple work supports) would receive reevaluation notices no more than twice a year. The division also changed staffing structures in the field. Processing center staff responsibilities were modified so that one decisionmaker assessed ongoing eligibility, except in complex cases where a program specialist was needed.

After implementation, division leaders described seeing almost-immediate results: Fewer reevaluation notices were sent, and partners gave positive feedback.

operations in the field. Another aspect involved considering how to track individuals through the process of receiving, retaining, and leaving IDHW health assistance to understand the points at which the system breaks down.

The WSS team identified several opportunities for ongoing data development. They plan to develop data that will describe the population being served and further unpack some of the reasons for churn. Division of Welfare leaders also hope to develop additional data to share with external partners to strengthen the division's capacity for evidence-based formative evaluation and planning (and to build trust with stakeholders through more open sharing of information and data).

Division of Welfare leaders attributed their data development success to ensuring that data analysts had substantial ongoing involvement with program and policy staff. Throughout the planning year, information management was almost always at the table, learning about programs, policies, and key issues of interest; seeing how data were used; getting feedback on how certain measures might be misleading or not useful; and working with operations and policy managers to jointly identify measures that would better support the department. The information management manager was a key member of the division's leadership team.

Idaho also focused on further institutionalizing data-driven decisionmaking. The WSS team wanted to build on Idaho's past efforts and continue to infuse the culture at all levels with a focus on data and to build staff capacity to use data effectively. An integral part of that effort was ongoing training and close work with field operations managers around interpreting and putting data to use.

To demonstrate the effective use of data, division leaders identified some already accepted goals—such as the average number of days applications were pending—then modeled ways data could be used to manage and monitor progress toward those goals. This training was followed up with weekly meetings to further discuss how various data reports could be used for local management. The success of this process depended on obtaining suggestions from field operations managers on the standards their offices or processing units could meet, and revisiting those expectations as policy and process changes were implemented.

Successful experiences with data-driven change and with rapid action toward Idaho’s large-scale vision helped more staff become comfortable with the state’s operating philosophy—continuing to institutionalize not just the focus on data but also the flexible, active approach to change. Even operational managers moved during the year to take on the win fast/fail fast philosophy; when asked to offer advice for other states thinking about replicating Idaho’s successes, one manager responded, “It’s okay to miss the mark. You won’t always get it right the first change....You have to keep coming back to it and shooting for the target. If everyone understands that you might miss the mark, it makes it okay.”

Creating the Next “Stretch” Vision

“You have to be willing to step away from the way you’ve done it. If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you always got....It’s really a matter of pushing the boundaries.”

—Field operations manager

“We [now] look at things completely differently. We’re not facilitating a benefit; we’re enhancing a work support, and we are confident in talking about it that way.”

—WSS team member

“We want a decision the same day and food stamp benefits delivered the next day. If we can’t do that, it’s not worth it.”

—WSS leadership team member

As Idaho moved into the WSS planning period, state leaders had a vision that went far beyond their substantial progress to date. Their philosophy was that this vision should be ambitious, positioned to take maximum advantage technology can offer, and not be constrained to what the world looks like today. In fact, this vision was viewed as essential to the division’s ongoing success in the context of increasing budget constraints and the expected demands related to implementation of health care reform. During the planning period, the division built on its initial goals, developing a much clearer “stretch” vision of where it wanted the service delivery system and work support programs to move in Idaho.

The division's long-term vision and most of its activities were grounded in the principle that what families most needed from the division was an eligibility decision. Thus, the WSS team members worked together toward three objectives: 1) applicants could make immediate contact with a decisionmaker; 2) application information would be verified in real time whenever possible; and 3) the decisionmaker could determine eligibility right away.

Coming into the planning year, Idaho was already supporting this kind of ambitious vision. Because federal rules require a decision on SNAP applications within 30 days, many states track the share of applications acted on within that time frame. However, because the division's goal was to make an eligibility decision on the day the application was received, staff also tracked the average number of days to decision (for SNAP 1.8 days and for Medicaid 7.8 days as of January 2013) and the share of applications for which a decision was made the same day (for SNAP 74.5 percent and for Medicaid 50.8 percent as of January 2013). The agency viewed those metrics as substantially more important and valuable to their work than the metric related to the federal requirement.

But while Idaho entered the planning year prepared to raise the bar on its service delivery system—and the state's initial planning-year proposal included several examples of next steps—the WSS team did not have a fully detailed description of what the next generation of service delivery might look like. That description came, in part, from an unlikely source: the intersection of Idaho's culture of efficient service delivery with health care reform.

When health care reform began during the planning year, the Idaho WSS team identified two important challenges. First, team members were concerned that cumbersome federal regulations that did not adequately consider the intersection of health services with other supports could make it more difficult for them to attain their WSS goals. Second, given the political controversy around the law, the team needed a way to improve service delivery, despite the uncertainty around policy choices yet to be made in Idaho and nationally on the major health reform parameters.

After internal deliberations and consultation with the national technical assistance team, the Idaho WSS team concluded that certain provisions of health care reform could help frame an enhanced vision. While many aspects of the law raised concerns, the focus on no-touch eligibility, greatly automated and simplified processes, and a simple, straightforward customer experience

reflected the direction that Idaho wanted to go. Idaho concluded that this vision of highly streamlined service delivery, and a greater focus on ensuring families continue to receive services for which they were eligible, would set an appropriately high bar for the state's next steps and that it would allow staff to move forward, whatever the outcome of highly debated provisions.

In April 2011, Governor Otter issued an executive order prohibiting Idaho state agencies from implementing health care reform. This order forced the division to think creatively about its approach to Medicaid program streamlining. The division identified Medicaid readiness activities that reflected its overall approach to ongoing program improvement and focused on work necessary for compliance with new federal rules (as distinct from activities related to Affordable Care Act (ACA) provisions that were still uncertain).

When the Center for Medicaid Services (CMS) made the "90-10" funding available, the division requested and received a waiver from the governor to work on the Medicaid readiness activities, including pursuing the CMS funding opportunity. The governor, and eventually the legislature, felt that using federal money to improve the efficiency of Idaho's existing service delivery system was appropriate. Idaho's application to CMS was approved in February 2012, and the legislature approved the use of the 90-10 funds in March 2012.

Idaho also moved ahead with its "stretch" vision by articulating during the year how the three WSS programs—nutritional assistance, health insurance, and child care—supported and stabilized the lives of low-income working families. Division leadership found that talking about the programs through this lens, and supporting this explanation with extensive data, helped them build shared understanding with stakeholders, the public, and legislators.

This framing was effective because it was consistent with the perspective of Idaho stakeholders that public programs should create independence, not dependence. "We don't have a reputation for handing out money and entitlement programs," one team member said. "We look at it as a work support. We're just trying to give people some stability. You work hard and take care of your family." Casting the programs in this light also helped reach families who may not have understood how the package of services would help them get back to work. "A lot of times, families are in really bad shape before they ask for help," another team member commented.

“Then they just want food stamps for the month. Our approach, I hope, has helped families see the package of services is not a handout; [it is] to help them get back on their feet.”

Perhaps the largest change to arise from this work support vision was Idaho’s agenda to improve delivery of child care assistance through the ICCP. Improving the ICCP was on the state’s original list of WSS goals, and staff asked to consult with the national child care technical assistance team very early in the planning year. The consultation helped state staff realize how much autonomy they had to remake child care policy under federal rules, since the program was a block grant.

At the same time, the new data the WSS team were scrutinizing highlighted major continuity

The Role of Child Care in Idaho’s Evolving Vision of Work Supports

Entering the planning year, the leadership team saw WSS as a chance to finally assess needs in the child care assistance program and identify areas for improvement. As the planning year progressed, the Idaho team became further convinced that to effectively promote family stability and self-sufficiency, the Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP) had to be a central facet of its work.

The team initially thought that the ICCP most needed technology improvements, especially moving child care case management from its separate legacy system to IBES. However, staff quickly shifted focus to quick wins that could immediately improve administrative efficiency while better supporting parents and child care providers. The team attributed this shift in focus to meetings with parents and providers that underscored the negative impact of the program’s complex rules and requirements. After meeting with the WSS national technical assistance team, Idaho’s leadership realized it was feasible to make changes to address those concerns. One Idaho team member said the technical assistance showed, “we do control our destiny. The [federal] rules are minimal.”

A major data accomplishment during the planning year was generating information about churn, retention, and case processing from the child care system consistent with what was being developed for SNAP and Medicaid. This information enhanced the WSS team’s capacity to measure effects of future program integration and improvement efforts across the full package of work supports. To support policy redesign, the team used data to model the effects of policy changes—such as to the income eligibility limit—on the ICCP caseload and program costs.

By November 2011, simple changes—such as aligning redetermination dates with other work supports and using information families provided for SNAP eligibility to determine ICCP eligibility—were already improving application processing and reducing the number of eligible families losing assistance during redetermination. In January 2012, the legislature approved several other policy changes, including aligning the ICCP income eligibility limit and citizenship requirements with SNAP and simplifying rules about activity hours, change reporting, and eligible work activities.

In the future, Idaho plans to simplify the ICCP assistance calculation so the amount is clear and meaningful to parents and to adjust parent copay rules to ensure that parents are contributing to the cost of child care. As rules and procedures are simplified, the division intends to implement additional operational and technology changes to better integrate the delivery of the ICCP with other work supports. Future plans for the ICCP also include ongoing cooperation with community-based organizations that can help address the quality of care purchased through ICCP and help inform parents about their child care options.

problems for child care recipients. And when state staff gathered child care stakeholders together, they found a long list of problems that child care providers believed hindered them from helping families. Armed with the data and the vision of how child care could support work, Idaho used the planning year to implement ICCP process and policy changes, simplify eligibility rules (with legislative approval), and lay out an even more ambitious ongoing agenda (see the text box for specifics).

Putting Operational Considerations Front and Center

“We used to... try to solve operational problems with policy. Policy is no longer king.”

—WSS leadership team member

“I don’t build anything without a stamp of approval [from the Operations Bureau Chief] on it. We always say, ‘We can’t make assumptions. We require the field approval.’ ”

—Bureau Chief for Automation

Ensuring that operational considerations were thoroughly and persistently taken into account in program planning and management was a key element of Idaho’s improvement effort in the years before WSS, and it was a vital aspect of the WSS team’s work in the planning year. The state’s management structure and approach was designed to support this principle. Operational staff members play a central, ongoing role in diagnosing problems, exploring solutions, designing changes, and making refinements. As an important member of Idaho’s leadership team, the operations bureau chief served as a direct liaison between the field and state-level leadership, and was instrumental in ensuring that the leadership team understood the realities in the field. The leadership team emphasized that no decisions were made without the perspective of the operations bureau chief.

The state’s operationally focused changes were supported by hiring additional process engineers. Early in the WSS planning year, the process engineers worked with the operations bureau chief and other members of the leadership team to support the development of a single reevaluation form for multiple benefits, repopulation of that form, revisions to notices, and so forth.

According to Idaho staffers, their operations-first focus also had a particular implication for technological changes: that information technology should always support, not drive, operational considerations. Idaho's staffing structure and Agile development approach—in which modifications were overseen by a business leader who worked closely with the information technology staff during development—were important to that concept. As part of the senior management team, the chief of automation was involved in wide-ranging discussions and meetings with operations and policy staff, and thus was immersed in the division's operational goals. Thus, as the division worked, for example, toward verifying client eligibility in real time, the development of electronic interfaces to support that goal was both motivated and shaped by operational considerations (see the text box for details).

In the Idaho team's view, policy (like technology) was an important support to effective operations, but not a driver. This required some organizational adjustments, as policy had always been seen as the business driver. Over the planning year, policy managers were asked to design and propose policy changes to support operational efficiency. For example, plans for an

Supporting Operations through Automated Verification Technology

A key part of Idaho's overall vision was to make as many eligibility decisions as possible the first time applicants contact the department. One division goal during the WSS planning year was to begin developing a system to support "automated verifications"—technology that would help self-reliance specialists (frontline workers) verify client circumstances affecting eligibility.

Work on this task during the planning year began with data from the Social Security Administration. Using WSS resources, the division hired an information technology solution architect to delve into these data and work with the bureau chief for automation to connect it to operational needs. A strong connection between technology architects and operations and policy managers was vital. "Before, we had nontechnical people telling us how they wanted the interface to help but no expertise in how, technically, it would work," one team member observed. "Then we had IT people with technical expertise that could pull and manage data but had no idea what to do with it."

Technology development began by identifying the data and variables that field staff felt were important and building the technology around those needs. The solution architect pulled file layouts for all Social Security sources; met with policy managers and product owners to select the data elements needed to process eligibility; figured out how to integrate the needs and the technical issues; produced a menu of options for construction; and made design recommendations. Consistent with Idaho's philosophy of continuous revision and change, the division's leadership team poked holes in the preliminary design, leading to further improvements. By April 2012, Idaho was ready to begin development.

Idaho intends to continue work on the technology development and data-sharing agreements—with Social Security and other data sources—for automatic verifications. That work will lead to the construction of a verification aggregator, which the team envisions as a single point of access to data verifying family eligibility for work supports.

integrated reevaluation process across programs required considering key eligibility rules (such as treatment of self-employment income). ICCP improvements required a host of policy changes to simplify eligibility determination.

During the planning year, Idaho was able to share this operational focus and its implications for effective service delivery with the other WSS states by hosting a site visit. In July 2011, 24 people from 8 of the WSS states spent three days in Idaho, learning about the state's eligibility processes, observing information technology tools and local office operations, and discussing Idaho's activities during the planning year. One WSS team member from another state described their impressions of Idaho achievements and the opportunities to learn from their experiences by saying, "It gives you a sense of hope when you see that they've faced the same issues we're going through. They've found a way to make process improvement changes. . . . We won't have to invent everything ourselves."

Communicating the Culture of Change to the Frontline Workforce

"Everyone gets used to change. It's expected and when they see it works, they want more. The whole culture shifted."

—IDHW leader

"It's our job to make sure we're overdoing the communication."

—WSS team leader

Idaho entered the planning year with a state-level staffing and management structure built around supporting continuous improvement. According to state leadership staff, Idaho's effective implementation of ongoing, incremental change was supported by a culture of continuous improvement that had permeated the Division of Welfare from top to bottom. During the planning year, the division's leadership aimed to further support and institutionalize this culture of continuous improvement through emphasizing a "problems-first" approach, communication, and systematic training.

The leadership team's joint decisions about priorities for improvement, including the planning process under WSS, were driven by a "problems-first" approach. Dealing with

problems first helped focus the division's efforts on changes that would make the biggest effectiveness and efficiency differences, which, in turn, helped encourage individual staff to set aside pet projects to work toward a shared goal. Problems were identified through data analysis and discussions with field staff, and successful resolutions helped support future change. "Staff don't get burned out with change," one respondent observed, "because they see change as something that aids and supports them."

Working with field staff to implement a universal workforce posed several challenges. Field operations managers thought that it took time to shift self-reliance specialists from thinking about "my workload" to thinking about "our workload." According to state staff, self-reliance specialists—and managers, in some cases—expressed anxiety about whether their positions would be eliminated or transferred, concern about whether staff were able to become effective generalists rather than specialists, and frustration over doing work that originated in other offices or processing centers.

To respond to these challenges, state leaders engaged with field staff, communicated clearly and frequently, and implemented a culture of standardization. When staff became available, work was pulled from the statewide queue, and because all staffers were trained to be generalists, each person could do all the work associated with each case. Additionally, data about the volume of work going into each office and processing unit was made visible to state-level staff, illustrating that the reallocation of work was based on differences in the amount of work coming in through various channels, not on the poor performance of certain workers or units. These data also helped increase managers' confidence that IDHW was examining individual performance and that all offices and processing units were being held to the same standard.

To support the extensive scope of change during the WSS planning year, staff at all levels communicated frequently to reassess priorities, create and track new initiatives (in the form of monthly sprints), and ensure the initiatives aligned with the division's overall vision. An executive operations team met daily, the WSS project management team met twice a week, and the benefits leadership team met in person at least weekly. In-person meetings that included benefit program leadership and field operations managers occurred quarterly; the operations bureau chief held weekly meetings with field operations managers who also interacted with one

or more leadership team members, nearly daily. Field managers were, in turn, expected to communicate frequently with staff through weekly and monthly staff meetings.

Early in the WSS planning year, a quarterly benefit managers meeting was devoted to presenting the WSS vision and plans for feedback and discussion. For two days, the leadership team from the central business office and field operations managers discussed the overall vision, health care reform, program integration ideas, child care changes, development of an online portal and real-time verifications, and the universal workforce. During each discussion, meeting participants considered the motivation for the proposed initiatives, possible improvements to better address the department's vision, challenges to be addressed, and training and communication needs to facilitate effective field implementation.

The continuous improvement embedded in Idaho's WSS planning-year activities was also supported in the field through coordinated training planned at the state level. Because the training manager was a member of the state senior leadership team, the training directly reflected leadership efforts and intentions. Rather than focusing on departmental or program policies, Idaho's field-staff training generally focused on implementation, leaving as little room for interpretation as possible.

The mode and intensity of training varied with the nature of the changes. For new practices or procedures, training often involved guided implementation practice in the field. For big paradigm shifts, in contrast, web meetings presented information to all staff statewide at once. IDHW leaders emphasized the importance of ensuring that everyone received the same information about large changes at the same time rather than over a series of meetings, between which rumors could form and across which the information could mutate. IDHW invested in video-conferencing technology to support the division's capacity to conduct statewide training and to help the leadership team communicate with field staff throughout the year.

By the end of the planning year, field staffers were more convinced of the benefits of the universal workforce concept. "It's grown and matured in the last year into something bigger and dynamic," a member of the leadership team commented. "We [now] have the concept and culture but lack some of the tools to make it [maximally] effective." Future plans to further expand the capacity of the universal workforce include establishing systems to track customer

volume and wait times in lobbies so in-person workload in specific offices can be considered and managed in real time, in tandem with phone, mail-in, and other caseload-related work statewide.

Strengthening Relationships with External Stakeholders

“I am most proud of the partnership network we have built. We have rebranded the division...It helped that we share our story about why we haven’t been good partners and why we are committed to the partnership going forward. WSS is a major part of that message.”

—WSS team member

“I appreciated the openness [of the Division of Welfare] to ask questions and listen [to our answers]. They want the honest feedback and wanted to problem-solve and not make excuses.”

—Community partner

Going into the planning year, Idaho proposed working with external stakeholders primarily to get help with diagnosing problems. As the planning year progressed, IDHW developed a substantially more expansive vision for its partnerships. Data analyses and quick wins from planning-year activities helped strengthen the relationships between the division and numerous stakeholders, including community-based organizations, private funding sources, and executive- and legislative-branch officials.

Before the planning year, the relationship between IDHW and external organizations was not especially strong. Division leaders felt they had neglected relationship-building because they needed to focus all their energy on implementing IBES and other operational changes. One WSS team member explained that with “so much internal change,” staff had “been buried,” and the division did not have the resources or time to put into partnering. The team member said:

“We were afraid partners would ask us to do things...that would create more work for us as they tried to address the fact that our service delivery mechanism wasn’t working...We had to fix the system before we could [work effectively with outside organizations.] If the house is broken and outside organizations are making recommendations for changes, all they are doing is adding something broken to a broken house.”

Division accomplishments—demonstrating good management, fiscal responsibility, and improved performance—in the time leading up to WSS were important for building trust and confidence among stakeholders. Building on that growing trust, the WSS leadership team used the planning year to reach out to and to strengthen relationships with external stakeholders. Some activities, such as quarterly stakeholder meetings and the development of a stakeholder bulletin, were initiated by IDHW. Others, such as having division leadership speak to boards of directors or groups of members, were initiated by stakeholders.

These meetings helped community-based organizations and division staff reach a shared understanding of challenges facing Idaho families. One partner noted, “The thing I’m most impressed with is [the division’s] ability to put end-user needs first and foremost ... and [ask] ‘How do we make it easy and efficient for [both customers] and the division?’” The meetings also served to help the division and its partners better understand the role that each plays in supporting families so their efforts can be complementary rather than contradictory or duplicative. In the words of one division leader, the ongoing relationship-building helped clarify “what we need partners to do and what we need to do.”

Respondents offered numerous examples of the benefits of these relationships. Armed with accurate information about how eligibility was determined, partners could better help customers navigate the system. Seeing data on the areas where clients seemed to be struggling motivated community partners to focus their energy differently. For example, the churn data highlighting the challenges of completing redetermination requirements might convince a partner to help customers understand the documentation needed to determine eligibility rather than to make suggestions for operational fixes that were out of sync with the division’s processes or that might distract from the division’s plans for system improvements.

The improved relationships also minimized the impact of service delivery glitches, something that the division and stakeholders were glad to be working on as partners rather than as adversaries. For example, during the planning year, a vendor was late loading food stamp benefits onto individual electronic benefit cards. The division notified community-based partners about the problem immediately, including an outline of action steps taken to resolve the problem. Consequently, “we jumped in and did everything we could to help,” one community-based

partner explained. “It could have been an attack opportunity. Had we not had the prior engagements, we might not have responded so well.”

The strategic pursuit of grants was another component of Idaho’s partnership-building strategy that emerged over the course of the planning year. In general, the pursuit of additional funding for government agencies and programs was contrary to Idaho’s conservative principles. WSS offered division leaders an opportunity to demonstrate that seeking funding for innovation could be consistent with conservative principles, particularly funding from private sources. Over the course of the planning year, the division applied for a Food and Nutrition Service grant to help with costs associated with online portal development and was invited to partner with a local hospital on a Health Care Innovation Challenge Grant. With support from a WSS funder, the Idaho team also began having meetings and discussions with other private funders and foundations.

The division also used WSS planning-year activities to better engage various government partners, including other state agencies and the legislature. A central focus of that effort was compiling evidence and talking points on the role IDHW programs play in supporting low-income working families along the path toward self-sufficiency. One WSS leadership team member said:

“We weren’t trying to change anyone’s political orientation, but we wanted to open some eyes to the idea that these are not just entitlement programs. They play a critical role in helping families trying to find stability. Relaxing that set of supports can make it difficult to go to work. If you’re making difficult choices about how to spread income within the family, it perpetuates the instability and may make you more likely to leave work.”

This effort, combined with the division’s data-driven quick wins—and its capacity to address questions raised by legislators and the governor’s office—helped secure legislative support for key policy changes during the WSS planning year.

Idaho Planning-Year Activities

Aligned reevaluation time frames across work support programs and reduced the issuance of multiple notices of reevaluation for families receiving more than one work support.

Implemented changes to field operations and the universal workforce so case management work could be redistributed, as needed, across the state.

Developed an action plan for phased development and rollout of an online portal and applied for a federal grant to support development.

Worked toward automatic verification of income for eligibility, including hiring a business architect to develop systems and procedures and beginning design for using data from Social Security Administration, as well as identifying additional sources.

Held meetings with the child care advisory council—and parents receiving assistance—to discuss and prioritize opportunities for streamlining and increasing efficiency.

Received legislative approval for rule changes to simplify child care eligibility and align with other programs; also implemented technology and process changes to use information from SNAP reevaluations for child care eligibility decisions.

Developed more sophisticated information grounded in data and used it for decisionmaking and planning and for discussions with external stakeholders, including creating measures related to churn and retention.

Prepared for implementation of health reform including developing data to support planning and incorporating expected ACA requirements into planning for the online portal, reevaluation process improvements, and automated verifications.

Assembled team from across IDHW to assess and make recommendations for required changes for Medicaid readiness related to rules and eligibility, notices, reporting, interfaces, and infrastructure.

Met with large stakeholder group quarterly and developed a partner bulletin to inform community-based organizations and to solicit input and feedback.

Held a funders event to present vision and planned initiatives to local and national partners and foundations; also solicited assistance from WSS funders to help shape strategy for pursuing private funding.

Hosted a three-day site visit for WSS states to observe Idaho's service delivery model; supporting technology; case management, communication, and data strategies; and WSS initiatives.

Conclusions

Idaho's Division of Welfare entered the WSS planning year with clear objectives and a management structure and operational philosophy designed to facilitate ongoing improvements. Building on their successes in the years leading up to WSS, division leaders sought to address client challenges in accessing key work supports, streamline the child care assistance program, better integrate key work support programs, and increase workforce productivity. In addition, the state was concerned about maintaining its record of timely and accurate case management

despite a rapidly growing SNAP caseload and uncertainties surrounding the implementation of health care reform.

During the planning year, Idaho worked to both sharpen the division’s long-term vision and—in keeping the division’s “win fast, fail fast” philosophy—implement monthly policy and process improvements. Early in the year, new data on client churn helped shape a key initiative, improving the redetermination process by aligning redetermination dates, combining client notices across programs, and further implementing the universal workforce case management approach. At the same time, state leaders strengthened and built relationships with a range of stakeholders and staff, including field managers, community-based organizations, potential private funders, legislators, and other states. In the second half of the planning year, the division implemented child care assistance program reforms including policy changes designed to better align child care policy with other work support programs and simplify eligibility requirements. The team described WSS as “an energizer and a catalyst,” also saying that “it brought a wealth of information to direct the path. The path is pretty much the same, but the focus has been strengthened.”

Building on lessons learned during the planning year—through data analysis, implementation successes and failures, and relationships with stakeholders—IDHW developed a proposal for the next phase of the WSS project and was awarded a three-year implementation grant. Idaho’s plan for the next three years articulates a strategy to “ensure low-income working families receive the supports they need to become self-sufficient.” Moving forward, the state plans to ensure ongoing improvements are sustained and enhanced as health care reform is implemented; to establish a customer self-service portal to free up caseworker time for complex case management activities; to move toward “no touch” eligibility decisions, whenever possible, with the assistance of the portal and a verification aggregator; to implement additional components of its universal workforce concept; to continue strengthening collaborative relationships with partners; and to further build the state’s capacity to carry out longitudinal analysis on case records for assessing program efficiency and effectiveness.

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Methodological Note

This report is based on several sources, including WSS evaluation team members' on-site and telephone interviews with Idaho WSS team members and others in the state involved in WSS and related efforts; WSS materials, including quarterly progress reports and quarterly call notes; and state documents, including the WSS proposal, action plan, presentations, relevant state web sites, state WSS data exercise results, state evaluation documents, and other materials made available by the state to the WSS evaluation team. Our three-day on-site visit in spring 2012 included 22 on-site interviews with state agency leadership and staff from SNAP, child care, Medicaid, and other economic assistance programs; the WSS management team; and community partners.

The goal of this Phase I evaluation was to draw on these sources to document the state's activities during the WSS Phase I planning year, including challenges encountered by the state and approaches chosen to overcome them. This goal arose from the particular features of the planning year and the nature of the lessons that could be distilled from this phase. In particular, during the planning year, states were assessing their current strengths and weaknesses, and designing and testing potential next steps, culminating in the development of an action plan (including clear goals and measurable targets along the way to reaching them). From an evaluation perspective, therefore, it was too early to assess whether states met measurable goals, but not too early to document what actually did happen, what bumps occurred along the way, and how states chose to respond. Thus, during the on-site visits, the evaluation team members attempted to gather input from a variety of perspectives, including local office staff and community stakeholders, but did not attempt to be comprehensive in gathering input from all perspectives in order to evaluate the effectiveness of planning-year activities.

Six states (Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and South Carolina) are continuing on to Phase II of the evaluation. This next phase has three major goals: to document, understand, and draw lessons from the implementation of WSS activities in the states; to identify and track over time key outcomes that we (the state) would expect to be affected by the state's activities and interventions; and to measure the effect WSS or specific activities under WSS had on key outcomes. To meet these goals, the Phase II evaluation will include implementation analyses and data-tracking activities for all six states as well as impact analyses to provide quantitative causal results, where feasible. Each state's evaluation will be tailored to their particular activities, goals, priorities, and data availability. The overall evaluation will combine information, analyzing data and results from across the states.