Trends in Technology – What's New in Child Support Automation Efforts

Now that most states have a certified case management system, how are they ensuring those systems stay current and keep up with optimum program management and service to their constituents? We posed a set of questions and reached out to five states that are in the process of upgrading, replacing, or optimizing their systems. Below are their answers.

What are your biggest technical challenges? How have you addressed them?

Colorado
The three largest technical challenges our state is facing today are internal modernization of our statewide system, building the system security infrastructure, and managing change to the capabilities of the system. Colorado migrated away from the restrictions of the mainframe environment to a contemporary server-based operating platform last year. A project is underway to complete the internal modernization of the system with our migration vendor. Building the system infrastructure to comply with the security and safeguarding requirements is a major effort and we have had to allocate a full-time position to help manage it. As has been the case for many years, maintaining and enhancing the system to improve program performance is a perennial challenge. We are hard at work with fixes, new ideas, and new projects. We are working closely with the Governor's Office of Information Technology to prioritize and accomplish this work.

Delaware
Data reliability in our old system had proved to be very challenging in present day use in order to maintain program performance. The system was also not scalable and difficult to modify. In 2004 a decision was made to move forward with replacing our 1987 system and a feasibility study was launched and an RFP was subsequently released to replace the system.

Kentucky
Our biggest challenge is keeping up with technology. Kentucky analyzed its child support system, Kentucky Automated Support and Enforcement System (KASES), and determined that modernizing it would be the most beneficial and cost effective avenue to take. Currently, the biggest enhancement project of KASES is the modernization project, which is broken down in phases and priorities, very much like working a puzzle.

KASES interfaces with the Jefferson County Automated Support and Enforcement System (JCASES) as the result of a federal waiver. While KASES is the system of record, both systems combine to make up Kentucky's child support statewide system. That system has been certified to meet Federal requirements for both the Family

Support Act of 1988 and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.

Massachusetts
Our system replacement project is our biggest challenge currently. The drivers were the challenges of our legacy system and our desire to have more flexible technology to carry us in to the future. Massachusetts is utilizing a custom built system with Commercial Off-The Shelf (COTS) subsystems (i.e. forms generation, IVR, etc.) that can meet the needs of their program and constituents and also be upgraded easily.

What technology programs do you plan on implementing over the next five years?

Colorado
The goal of the internal modernization project is to fully implement a tiered architecture where we will have isolated the user interface, business processes, and database into separate layers. We expect this new architecture will speed our ability to re-engineer the business of child support and more easily incorporate new technology and interoperability. It will also facilitate expansion of our data warehouse and business intelligence capabilities. Refining the security infrastructure and the associated monitoring, detection, and compliance testing methodologies will remain a significant technology program for years to come.

Delaware
Our goal was to progress through the various phases of our project to modernize and replace the existing system and to build it so that it meets our program performance guidelines as well as streamline the case management process. We wanted to ensure that our replacement system insures data reliability as well.

Kentucky
Kentucky will be focusing on the modernization project as described in the first question.

Louisiana
The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) embarked on a new project in 2010 known as CAFÉ (Common Access Front End). The overall goal was to modernize the Department's ability to deliver services to the citizens of Louisiana in a holistic and collaborative manner. The primary focus of this project is the implementation of web-based portals for the client (customer) and the caseworker. The customer portal allows clients to view information and services provided by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The caseworker portal has a number of components to assist with case management. These portals integrate with each of the department's stand-alone information systems (legacy) supporting each program.

The implementation of this project has been a phased approach. The Customer Portal was implemented in 2012; the online child support application was integrated with the

Customer Portal in January 2013. The Child Support Worker Portal has a planned implementation schedule for March 2014.

Massachusetts
Our current focus is the upgrade of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Enforcement Tracking System (COMETS).

Are they modifications to existing systems, replacement of existing systems, or implementation of new systems?

Colorado
Fortunately, our system does a good job supporting the child support program and is received well by its users. Given budgetary limitations and the need to keep risk as low as possible, Colorado will continue its approach of making incremental modification to the existing system. This is not to say we wouldn't replace large portions of the system with new technology if the opportunity presents itself.

We in the child support community all share the goal of having a modern child support system. Do any of us ever arrive at this destination? Given the rapid pace of technological change as well as the changing world we live in, incremental modification seems to offer the best approach for our state going forward today.

Delaware
On October 1, 2013 we completed the replacement of our outdated mainframe system through a phased approach that began in 2004 with a feasibility study and alternatives analysis. Following the results of the study, an RFP was released and a vendor was chosen to build the new system. The project began in June 2010. The new system went live October 1, 2013 and is under warranty until September 2014. We have applied for Federal certification and hope to have that process completed by June, 2014.

Kentucky
Given the nature of the modernization project, substantial modifications to the Jefferson County system, JCASES, would have to be made. A two-year study, which included office restructuring, data element analysis, training, and a change management initiative, was conducted. Other county child support staff visited Jefferson County's Office to answer questions and provide their expertise on how their offices operate using KASES. It was decided that in order for Jefferson County child support staff to utilize the modernized solutions to the fullest benefit that it will offer, JCASES users would be migrated to KASES.

A study of the two systems and office procedures provided a gap analysis and a transition plan. The gap analysis revealed several system features that needed to be added to KASES. These are being developed and implemented at this time. The transition plan will be in place to train and assist Jefferson County staff in conducting office operations using KASES as seamlessly as possible.

While the Jefferson County work was undertaken, Kentucky also phased in other modernization efforts. Three tools were included in phase one. The Kentucky Child Support Interactive (KCSI) Web Portal kicked off the first phase and is the first tool. Key features of the portal enable custodial and non-custodial parents to have the ability to access and view their child support information, apply for child support services, locate a child support office, make a payment, figure an estimate for their child support obligation, and view postings of recent news bulletins. The portal also provides caseworkers the ability to send a notification to one particular participant, to all participants on a case, or to all CPs and NCPs in the county and/or state.

The second tool is the Information Search/Exchange Portal (ISEP), used by child support staff to locate information concerning a participant. Caseworkers are able to search information from eighteen different agencies from a single screen. Workers can choose to send the retrieved data to the child support system automatically.

Included in phase one is the Business Intelligence Reporting Solution (BI). This is a reporting tool that affords specific caseworkers the ability to generate reports from their dashboard. Examples of the reports available are paternity establishment, current support paid, arrearages paid, medical support enforcement, delinquency reports, the OCSE 157, and OCSE 34a. Case workers may also generate performance reports as well as create customized reports based on criteria the worker sets. Phase one was successfully implemented in 2012.

Phase two was implemented in May, 2013 and provides policy and procedure on a web-based application. Workers now have access to up-to-date policy and procedures uniformly across the state. When changes are made, the entire child support agency is aware of it within seconds. Additional features to the web-based application include providing a change request process and workflow and adding Frequently Asked Questions.

The last phase provides the Electronic Case File (ECF) and includes electronic scanning of case files so the agency can "go green." The beginning piece of this project is set to go live in October, 2014. A worker will be able to scan and index paper documents and then search, view, and print as needed.

Kentucky has very capable technical staff and the modernization project is being successfully implemented because the work is being done in-house. The benefits for keeping the project in-house enabled a phased approach where the basic functions could be implemented and enhancements added at a later time. Also, there was no constraint of contract terms such as deliverables based on payments.

The technical staff formed a Business Analysis Team. This team analyzes and captures requirements and serves as liaison between the child support agency and the technical staff. The Business Analysis Team set a "core" group of four child support staff—one each from large, medium and small sized offices and one person from central office. An "expanded" group was also formed to add nine additional child support staff with the

same sampling from around the state as the core group. The core group provided initial input for recommendations and then secured buy-in and feedback from the expanded group. The expanded group then validated the recommendations and assisted with testing and training.

Kentucky's technical staff is an integral part of the state's child support agency and as a team sets a platform for success in the Child Support Enforcement Program. We learned that working toward the same goal is more easily accomplished when our vision of the future is the same.

Louisiana
At this time there are no plans to replace the existing child support legacy system.

Massachusetts
We are replacing the existing COMETS system with a new and upgraded system. All systems, including core case management, data warehousing, IVR, website, and imaging will all be replaced. Over the years, subsystems were built to accommodate changes and upgrades and now those will be replaced and consolidated into one system as well.

What is the purpose of these systems projects? Meet new state or federal Requirements? Take advantage of new technology to reduce cost or improve service? Address existing issues with legacy systems?

Colorado
The purpose of the systems projects we've described is actually all of the above. Security is a necessary requirement that in and of itself does not enhance the program's performance. New technology and business process reengineering are focused on increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and ultimately achieving strategic outcomes.

Delaware
We wanted to improve data reliability and take advantage of new technology in order to provide some web based customer functionality to our constituents. An imaging system has been implemented to reduce the number of hard copy files, which we hope will prove to be very effective in managing caseloads and the flow of information among the child support agency, our IV-D attorneys, and our Family Court.

Kentucky
Yes to all of the above.

Louisiana
For our customers, the CAFÉ Customer Portal provides a single entry point for all services provided by Department of Children and Family Services. Services include: Child Support Enforcement, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, Child Care Assistance, Family Independence, Temporary Assistance, Kinship Care Subsidy, and Louisiana

Combined Application. This portal also allows the customer to obtain case specific information and reduces the need for caseworker interaction.

For our caseworkers, the CAFÉ Worker Portal will provide single sign-on, which will allow the caseworker to access all of the automated systems that are needed to efficiently and effectively perform their duties. The CAFÉ worker portal will provide a case management tool for child support caseworkers that will allow caseworkers to better organize and prioritize their work. In addition, CAFÉ will provide child support supervisors and managers with tools to monitor productivity and adherence to federal and state law and regulation and policy.

Massachusetts
We are taking advantage of new technology. The current system is not flexible and not easy to change, thus requiring a lot of manual intervention. The system does process payments very well, but all other functionality needs to be replaced and is currently primarily a manual process. We are implementing better tracking and business process management technologies to help automate the management and move toward event driven architecture. Additionally, we would like our end system to be easily configurable.

When we wrote our RFP, our intent was to meet all current federal guidelines as well as improve technology. We are taking advantage of what is currently on the market today.

How could OCSE help ensure success on these projects? What have they done well in the past? What could they do better?

Colorado
OCSE could help ensure success among states by continuing their efforts to facilitate the establishment of interstate standards. AEI (Automated Enforcement Interstate) is a prime example. We believe these standards would dramatically streamline and simplify our systems as well as operations for all states.

Many projects depend on timely approval from OCSE. Thus, improving the response time for review and approval would help ensure successful timing of projects.

Delaware
OCSE's involvement has been critical to our keeping on schedule with our systems project. Having OCSE staff on site is beneficial when evaluating each project phase. With the certification guidelines approaching the 20-year mark, updating those guidelines would help when planning the new system. Of particular challenge is parentage. Today's families are not just traditional mother and father families, and many families are comprised of same sex parents, adoptive parents, and surrogate parents. OCSE could help us by addressing this in new system certification guidelines.

As our system replacement will ultimately require certification by OCSE, it is also a challenge to try and build a system that will be customizable in the event that guidelines are revised to include new requirements.

Kentucky
OCSE provides excellent technical support when questions arise.

Louisiana
OCSE has always been instrumental in providing necessary guidance. I only recommend that it continue.

Massachusetts
While most of the guidelines may be considered by some to be dated, they are still required to be part of a certified system. It is our hope that the guidelines will be re-visited by OCSE and reviewed with modernization in mind. OCSE has remained an invaluable partner with us throughout this process and we will continue to seek their involvement.

Are there any regional or other group systems activities that have reduced cost or improved services and that could be leveraged by other states/groups?

Colorado
Federal level work groups of the past are examples of how states came together with OCSE to design initiatives like the Financial Institution Data Match (FIDM) and the Federal Case Registry (FCR). The outcome was very effective and this helped states reduce costs and improve services.

In addition, the systems conferences of the past provided states a productive forum in which to share knowledge and transfer technology. Restoring these collaborative venues would surely result in improvement to the program nationally, but they are costly to convene. We will need to work creatively to overcome the budgetary limitations we face at all levels of government.

Delaware
Delaware is state operated and administered with three counties. Our outreach within the state is easily accomplished and maintaining the involvement of case management staff has not been difficult. System conferences such as the one provided by OCSE provide us with an opportunity to learn what other states are doing as their systems age and what they are doing to move forward. This collaboration and exchange of information is very helpful to us.

Kentucky
If the question refers to group system activities, such as entering into an agreement to participate with Rhode Island's Child Support Lien Network (CSLN), then, yes, this has

helped to improve administrative enforcement regarding Personal Injury and Workers Compensation claims.

<u>Massachusetts</u>
Our training unit has recently been re-organized and will remain with the project throughout its life cycle.

Elizabeth Atwell is a Child Support and Health and Human Services Professional who has worked in state and federal government, as well as the private sector.