

Implementing Welfare Eligibility Software

After the state of **California** mandated that counties replace their outdated welfare eligibility software with a new system, **Sacramento County** (1,223,000) was the second of 18 counties to implement CalWORKS Information Network (CalWIN). The new system now provides much more accurate information on eligibility for CalWORKS, the state's welfare program for needy families.

Leadership/staffing

The state contracted with a company to develop CalWIN. The 18 counties that are implementing the system have a joint contract with the company to convert their data to the new system.

Timeline

Sacramento County shut down its old system for about a week in late February 2005 while its data were being converted to CalWIN. Before the shutdown, the county developed a temporary in-house system so that it could continue to serve residents during this period. At the beginning of March, the county went live with CalWIN.

Budget/funding

The 18 counties used state and federal funds to finance a \$744 million, 10-year contract with the developer of CalWIN.

Program description

Prior to CalWIN, Sacramento County used a 30-year-old system that was based on cases. This made it impossible to link all information on an individual's income and benefits to information on that individual. Social workers had to track certain kinds of information on clients on their own because the system did not store many kinds of data. If an individual was eligible for two different programs, that individual would have two different cases and two different records.

CalWIN is based on individuals, not cases, so it links all relevant information to each individual. Now, if a child is eligible for benefits because she lives with a disabled parent, this income will continue to be linked to the child's information when she moves in with an aunt. Ultimately, the system should provide much more accurate information on clients than the old system did. It should also increase the efficiency of the county's human assistance staff and decrease the number of forms that clients have to fill out.

Before the conversion, the county did several test conversions. At first, up to 20,000 of its 135,000 cases failed to convert. But by the time the county actually converted its 135,000 cases, only 206 of these cases failed to convert. Up to 80 percent of its cases were discrepant, however, which means that the records on these cases did not contain complete information because the old system did not store all the information that CalWIN requires.

The county provided two weeks of training on the new system to all 1,800 human assistance staff. Now that the system has been implemented, staff are collecting the needed information on the discrepant cases.

Results

When the county first implemented CalWIN, 78,000 cases were discrepant. That figure is now down to 5,000. Some staff are finding the new system very valuable, but many are still getting used to it. The county anticipates that it will take six months to a year for

staff to become comfortable with CalWIN and for the county and its residents to reap the full benefits of this system.

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