



CALIFORNIA
EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Award Category: Digital Experience/ Enterprise Solutions
Project: Unemployment Insurance/Revolutionizing Eligibility Determinations
Project Dates: 1/2023 - 9/2024
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We proudly nominate the exceptional technical team behind the E-Determinations Project (E-DETS) for their transformative contributions in revolutionizing California's Unemployment Insurance (UI) eligibility determination process. This groundbreaking initiative has turned a traditionally cumbersome and time-consuming system into a seamless, efficient, and fully automated online platform. By streamlining the eligibility process, the E-DETS system has enabled the swift and accurate delivery of claimant information, enhancing the overall claimant experience and improving operational efficiency within the Employment Development Department (EDD).

Since the system's implementation, over 108,000 E-DET cases have been initiated, with 69% of claimants opting to respond electronically to eligibility information requests, while the remaining 31% were scheduled for telephone interviews. These impressive results align with claimant preferences, showing that 78-80% of claimants favor electronic communication, 15-17% prefer phone interactions, and 3-7% still opt for paper. Additionally, over 4,400 questionnaires have been processed through the system, demonstrating significant improvements in both the speed and accuracy of eligibility determinations. Notable processing times include:

- Questionnaire Response (Sent to Due Process Accepted): 1.22 days
- Due Process to Unprocessed: 0.68 days
- Unprocessed to Under Review: 1.09 days
- Under Review to Completion: 2.23 days

The E-Determinations project has reduced the reliance on paper and phone interactions, thereby accelerating determinations and improving the accuracy of eligibility assessments. This shift to digital processing has been a critical step in ensuring that California's UI benefits are delivered to those in need efficiently and without delay.

IDEA

Addressing a Key Challenge in Public Service:

The E-DETS Project was born out of the need to address a significant and longstanding challenge in California's UI program: the cumbersome, inefficient, and error-prone process of determining eligibility for unemployment benefits. Prior to the project's launch, the system relied heavily on manual processes such as paper forms, telephone interviews, and manual data entry, all of which contributed to delays in processing claims, increased administrative burden, and claimant dissatisfaction.

The traditional process created substantial bottlenecks in California's UI system, particularly during high-demand periods like recessions when unemployment claims surged. Claimants were often frustrated by the need to participate in lengthy phone interviews or deal with delays in receiving or sending paper documents. Additionally, the heavy reliance on human intervention in reviewing and processing claims led to higher rates of error, inconsistency, and miscommunication between the EDD and claimants.

E-DETS aimed to address these challenges by automating the entire eligibility determination process—from the submission of required information to the final decision on benefits. Central to

the system's development was the automation of the DE2403 questionnaires, which are essential to determining eligibility for unemployment benefits. These questionnaires are necessary to assess factors such as misconduct, voluntary quit, Workers' Compensation status, and whether claimants are able and available for work. The introduction of automation enabled the rapid submission and processing of claimant data, eliminating the need for paper forms and reducing manual review by EDD staff.

Additionally, the E-DETS platform introduced an entirely electronic communication system, which gave claimants the ability to interact with the EDD system quickly and easily. This allowed for faster response time, real-time updates, and a more reliable process. This automation not only simplified the system for the claimant but also freed up staff time to focus on more complex cases, significantly improving overall operational efficiency.

In essence, the E-DETS system was designed as a technology-driven solution to a legacy problem, turning a slow, paper-heavy, and error-prone process into a seamless, automated, and efficient system that could handle the large volume of claims California receives annually.

IMPLEMENTATION: TIMELINE & KEY MILESTONES

From Vision to Reality: A Phased Journey of Innovation

The success of the E-DETS Project is a direct result of a meticulously executed two-phase implementation strategy. Each phase built on the momentum of the last—delivering new capabilities, expanding functionality, and ensuring a future-ready, scalable system that's now transforming how Californians access critical unemployment services.

Phase 1: Laying the Groundwork for Transformation

January – December 2023

The journey began in January 2023 with a bold goal: reimagine the eligibility determination process for California's Unemployment Insurance program. This vision quickly took shape through collaborative planning, strategic technical validation, and a commitment to user-centered design.

- **Initiation & Planning:** Cross-functional teams convened to define both functional and technical high-level designs.
- **Proof of Concept (POC):** A working prototype validated the system's architecture and timeline—paving the way for successful execution.

Key Milestones:

- **Requirements Finalized** – *March 2023*
- **Design Completion** – *August 2023*
- **Development Completed** – *September 2023* (concurrent with design)
- **Go-Live** – *December 21, 2023*

This successful launch marked the beginning of a new digital era for the EDD, with automation at the core.

Phase 2: Scaling Innovation & Enhancing the Experience

January – September 2024

Building on the momentum of Phase 1, Phase 2 focused on expanding capabilities, addressing user feedback, and refining system performance to better serve California’s workforce.

- **Expansion & Enhancements:** The team introduced additional features, resolved outstanding issues, and fine-tuned processes to increase automation and responsiveness.

Key Milestones:

- Requirements Finalized – *January 2024*
- Design Completion – *May 2024*
- Development Completed – *June 2024*
- Go-Live – *September 26, 2024*

This second phase cemented the E-DETS platform as a robust, resilient solution capable of meeting the dynamic needs of the state’s Unemployment Insurance program.

A Lasting Foundation for the Future

Together, these two phases laid the groundwork for a modernized, scalable, and sustainable system—one that empowers claimants, strengthens operational agility, and upholds California’s commitment to excellence in public service.

This team’s ability to deliver on such a complex vision, across multiple milestones, deserves to be celebrated as a model of innovation, execution, and impact.

IMPACT

The E-DETS Project has had a profound impact on California's UI program, which is the largest in the nation, serving millions of unemployed workers. The significance of this project lies not only in its ability to streamline and digitize a crucial public service process, but also in its role in improving the quality and speed of service delivery to millions of Californians during times of economic hardship.

Several factors underscore the transformational nature of the E-DETS system:

1. **Improved Efficiency:** The automation of eligibility determinations has allowed the system to process more than 70,000 determinations through the online platform. This has resulted in a significant reduction in the time it takes to complete a claim, which has directly reduced the need for phone interviews and paper-based communication. This faster processing time has helped ensure that claimants receive benefits more quickly, reducing the waiting period for financial relief. The streamlined process has also enabled the EDD to handle larger volumes of claims, which is particularly important during times of high unemployment.
2. **Enhanced Accuracy:** Human error has always been a concern in manual claim processing. The digital nature of the E-DETS system has drastically reduced the potential for errors in

eligibility determinations. The system ensures that all claimant data is captured correctly, processed consistently, and verified in real time. With the elimination of paper forms and manual data entry, the system has not only improved data accuracy but also consistency across cases. This has resulted in more reliable decision-making, reducing the risk of misinterpretation and ensuring that decisions are based on accurate, real-time information.

3. **Operational Burden Reduction:** Before the E-DETS system, EDD staff were heavily burdened with manual data entry, answering phone calls, reviewing paper forms, and conducting interviews. This time-consuming work left staff little room to address more complex cases or prioritize claims that required immediate attention. By automating many of the routine tasks, the E-DETS system has reduced the workload on UI staff and allowed them to focus on higher-priority claims, improving the overall operational efficiency of the EDD. The reduction in manual processing has also improved the department's scalability, allowing it to better manage demand spikes during periods of economic crisis.
4. **Broader Economic Impact:** The faster and more accurate processing of unemployment claims has far-reaching economic benefits. In periods of economic downturn or job losses, unemployment benefits provide critical financial support to individuals who are temporarily out of work. By ensuring that claimants receive their benefits without delay, the E-DETS system helps maintain economic stability for thousands of California households. This is especially important during economic recessions or crises (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), where timely delivery of benefits can help families stay afloat and minimize the negative economic impact.
5. **Improvement in Claimant Experience:** The digital-first approach of E-DETS aligns with claimant preferences. Research has shown that a majority of claimants prefer to communicate and interact with state systems electronically, and the E-DETS system caters to these preferences by allowing claimants to submit forms online, receive updates via email and SMS, and access their information through an easy-to-use platform. Claimants who have used the new system have reported a vastly improved experience, with many noting that the process is faster, more transparent, and less stressful than the previous phone-and-paper-based method. Additionally, claimants can now track their claims in real time, receive regular status updates, and access critical information much more efficiently.
6. **Operational Cost Savings:** One of the most significant impacts of the E-DETS system is the cost savings it has generated for the state. By eliminating the need for paper processing, mailing, and telephone support, the state has significantly reduced the costs associated with these manual processes. The system's ability to handle a higher volume of claims with fewer resources has led to substantial savings in administrative costs. These savings are critical in ensuring that public resources are used efficiently and that funds can be allocated to other areas of the program.
7. **Increased Accuracy and Reduced Fraud Risk:** The automation of the eligibility determination process has also reduced the risk of fraud. By using electronic forms, the E-DETS system can apply built-in data validation rules to ensure that information is consistent and accurate. Additionally, real-time data processing allows the system to flag any

discrepancies or inconsistencies for further review. This has helped to maintain the integrity of the system while minimizing the possibility of fraudulent claims being processed.

8. **Customer Satisfaction:** Customer satisfaction surveys and claimant feedback highlight the success of the project in improving claimant satisfaction. The ability to submit claims and receive updates electronically has enhanced trust in the system, with many respondents noting that the new system is faster, more convenient, and reliable. This improved experience has contributed to a positive shift in public perception of the state's ability to deliver unemployment benefits efficiently.

Conclusion

The E-Determinations Project has set a new standard for innovation in public service delivery. By leveraging automation and technology, the project has transformed a previously outdated and inefficient process into a streamlined, digital-first solution that meets the needs of California's vast workforce. Through improvements in speed, accuracy, and overall efficiency, the E-DETS system has not only benefited claimants but also enhanced the operational efficiency of the Employment Development Department.

The leadership of the E-Determinations Technical team has been instrumental in the project's success. Their ability to overcome challenges, implement improvements, and build strong relationships with stakeholders has played a key role in ensuring that the E-DETS system continues to perform reliably and effectively. By modernizing California's UI eligibility determination system, the project has laid the groundwork for future innovations in state government service delivery, setting a new benchmark for public service modernization.

The E-Determinations Project serves as a powerful example of how digital transformation can drive positive change in government services, benefiting not only the state but also the individuals who rely on these services during times of need.