

Camellia Eligibility Tool

Summary

The Governor's Task Force to Strengthen Alabama Families, created through a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to the state of Alabama, is a partnership of 28 members from public and private sectors. The task force includes the Commissioners of six (6) state agencies, representatives of health and human services, the Governor's Office, workforce and economic development, state legislators, family services centers and other community leaders. The team's mission is to redesign and strengthen health and human services to provide easily accessible, accountable and coordinated public and private services, producing the best possible outcome for Alabama's citizens. Camellia I, the first in a series of eligibility projects by the task force, is a web-based tool that enables and empowers families to achieve self-sufficiency through a pre-screening eligibility tool. The walk-through wizard can be taken in the privacy of one's home or in a family services center with assistance from staff.

Prior to Camellia I, individuals or families in need were on their own in locating services. This required citizens to personally identify agencies and find transportation to the nearly 30 physical locations offering services. Upon arrival, they often times found they were not eligible for the services and unfortunately, were not always referred to services they may qualify for. This was only one of numerous challenges within the system.

With the introduction of Camellia I, Alabama citizens now have the opportunity to complete a self-eligibility screening for nearly 30 programs in six primary, multi-generational health service agencies. Camellia I is helping clients self-determine, and more accurately define, what benefits they are qualified to receive.

This major undertaking could not have been accomplished without significant contributions and collaboration across state agencies. The task force and partners secured over \$70,000 in private donations to pilot the project and purchase the source code for this eligibility tool. The Camellia I project is a major accomplishment for the state of Alabama and has placed our state as one of the first in the country to help empower individuals and families by delivering a self-guided eligibility tool. In fact, at this point, only one other state in the nation has completed such a project.

The Camellia project is the first step in a series of collaborations between public and private services. This tool will strengthen the holistic approach of providing services and enabling families to attain the highest level of self-sufficiency. Using innovative processes, the eligibility tool will create greater communication between clients and agencies. It will also increase consumer knowledge through improved screening and identification of the closest resource by county.

Camellia I, named after Alabama's state flower, will continue to strengthen families through an innovative, client-driven assessment tool that positions our state in the forefront of technology and human services.

Justification

Project: Camellia Eligibility Tool

The Problem

In 2005, the Governor's Task Force to Strengthen Alabama Families held a series of focus groups across the state to determine most critical needs in health and human services. As a result, the following challenges were identified:

- Clients feel agencies are willing and able to deliver services; however, they are frustrated and hampered by the inability to identify and gain access to those services;
- Clients are required to visit numerous locations in order to determine eligibility, often times finding that after making the trip to the agency, they are not eligible for services and programs offered; and
- Following screening for services, agencies often times do not refer clients to other agencies that may be able to offer assistance. Many times this comes from lack of knowledge of what other agencies provide, as well as lack of time to conduct complete referral services; and
- Once identified, traveling to individual agencies is impeded due to lack of transportation available to families with the greatest needs.

The Solution

In light of information gained in the '05 focus group settings, the 2006 Work Plan of the task force included goals to develop a website and online tool to provide easy access to information about Alabama's resources and individual eligibility in various services. A team of agency commissioners, directors and IT specialists drafted a 25-point questionnaire to capture fundamental eligibility and referral information for six primary human service agencies. These agencies included mental health, public health, senior services, rehabilitative services and Medicaid.

The task force's Performance Metrics Committee reviewed the goals, critical issues, objectives and strategies established by state agencies through the State of Alabama's SMART budgeting process. Subsequently, the Camellia Pilot Project and performance measures were launched. Assisted by the full task force, the Performance Metrics Committee and agency IT personnel, the pilot project technology vendor and the state Information Services Division (ISD) teamed up to create the common benefits and assessment-screening tool.

Camellia I was developed with a .NET-connected solution, enabling agencies to integrate their systems in a timely and more responsive manner.

The initial web-based pilot project linked Montgomery and Perry Counties, allowing intake workers access to a common benefits and assessment screening instrument. Local state agencies and family service centers were utilized in order to continue the focus on communities as the catalysts to promote collaboration. Each Camellia site was furnished

with a dedicated PC for clients' access to the tool. When needed, assistance was readily available to aid with completing the eligibility questionnaire. Two volunteers were assigned to the project through the Alabama State University health and human services internship program.

The eligibility tool was tested by several consumer groups to ensure the process was not only user-friendly—but also delivered accurate results. In November 2006, the tool source code was purchased, and the task force and ISD began the arduous task of preparing the tool for statewide access. This included gathering and writing the business logic for each of Alabama's 67 counties. Through the efforts of the task force and with in-kind and financial assistance from numerous community and business partners throughout the state, the project was launched statewide.

The eligibility tool can be accessed through the new site: www.camellia.alabama.gov. This project has been internalized through ISD to ensure continuation beyond the grant period and to allow the project to broaden in scope. Plans are underway to add services through other agencies and to provide consumer information to clients.

The Results

Results of this innovative online eligibility tool can be demonstrated at many levels.

Benefits to the Consumer:

The greatest advantage is the service this tool provides to needy families in Alabama. Citizens no longer are standing 'in line' waiting to determine eligibility for services. They are now going 'online' in the comfort of their own homes and, through the user-friendly wizard, are identifying services for themselves and their families. Possibly the most important accomplishment is empowering families to identify much-needed services they once were unaware of.

This tool also:

- Reduces part of the complexity of entering the system without knowledge of the services or locations of the services;
- Gives consumers the skills to help evaluate their own eligibility or the eligibility of family members;
- Saves time and transportation costs and is easier on families with children or those with disabilities;
- Helps consumers assess and identify their choices and begin a plan of action;
- Helps consumers take charge of their situation and devise strategy to overcome circumstances in a holistic way;
- Empowers families to enter the system;
- Implements an action for self care with less stress in trying to maneuver the system;
- Provides a better view of all possible services;
- Introduces a 'no wrong door' approach to services;
- Directs consumers to services they may be eligible for and minimizes the number of agency visits they are most likely not eligible for;

- Identifies resources consumers may not have been aware of;
- Refers consumer to family services centers (private help) if they are not eligible for state agencies;
- Private agencies, organizations, human resource managers, schools and others can use tool to help employee, family members, children and members of community when reaching out to those in need;
- Resource links provide valuable information to those unfamiliar with state resources; i.e., the link on unemployment has unemployment application online; and
- User-friendly wizard walks clients through the eligibility process.

Benefits to Agencies:

- Mutual dedication to fostering cooperation and collaboration between agencies. Tool allows agencies to help consumers seek other resources and provides location of such; i.e., consumer seeks assistance, but another family member resides in a neighboring county;
- Meaningful role in the establishment of eligibility across agencies;
- Cost savings: pilot project initially funded and source code purchased through private donations and then gifted to state;
- Common front approach: gateway to systems to provide recipient and agency a broader approach to multiple services and assistance; broadest possible look for agencies in their initial intake;
- Initial phase of simplifying intake process. Web-base can screen more clients without having to have face-to-face interview in some beginning stages;
- System can serve as a building block to an intake and referral process over time;
- Virtual restructuring that can ease work for intake workers;
- Working effectively together has created cooperative, across agency teams that are continuing to work towards the further development of Camellia;
- Provides first step in accessing and sharing information;
- Gives an efficient, accountable, assessable and coordinated tool to use in assessment of consumers;
Streamlines eligibility assessment and makes case management consumer and family focused;
- Tactical communications and eligibility plan across agencies and statewide in an efficient and assessable way;
- Gives frontline agency employees another tool to assist those seeking services in other areas;
- Effective way to encourage team building across agency and community lines;
- Help the front-end process in meeting needs in a more effective and efficient manner;
- Encourages information flow by focusing on effective and concise methods of determining eligibility;
- Gives agencies an initial survey of what other services the client/family may be eligible for to help plan strategy for success and some basic expectations on whether help needs to come from public or private sector;
- Forms a partnership with the public sector as family services centers, schools, churches and other non-profit agencies can interact through the tool;

- Virtual tool strengthens the ability to respond to all inquiries regardless of where they live;
- Brings public and private sector together, blending to give broader services;
- Reduction of workload through elimination of consumers that are not eligible;
- Possible increase in numbers of eligible clients;
- Gives more documented time to help eligible clients;
- Improved productivity and perhaps resulting in a better self image of the worker by achieving more meaningful outcomes;
- Merges many applications into one 25-question tool, saving time and creating a more efficient engagement with the clients;
- Recognizes and teaches the components of future collaboration on holistic case management;
- Encourages creative thinking that crosses agency lines and merges agencies together in a client centered care; and
- Fosters cooperation, communication and community relationships.

Due to this innovative tool, a process that was once inefficient and often unavailable is now meeting the needs of Alabama’s citizen in a productive, time and cost-savings manner. It truly provides a win-win situation for all.

Marketing Efforts

The launch of this unique tool, directing clients to multi-generational services, was covered by media across the state. Agencies and Family Resource Centers throughout Alabama received information to share with clients. Those most often the first to recognize a family’s needs will be notified of this service; i.e. teachers and faith-based organizations. In addition, libraries, the locations where many people searching for service agencies go to surf the Web, will be educated of the tool.

Camellia Site and Eligibility Tool Images



www.camellia.alabama.gov



Sample Page of Questionnaire



Questionnaire Results