



COLORADO

**Governor's Office of
Information Technology**

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Universal Application

Nomination Category	Cross-Boundary Collaboration and Partnerships
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uniting programs across government entities, localities, education institutions, and non-profit programs has historically been a challenge for state governments. The State of Colorado looked at this problem specifically from the perspective of Colorado families, who often were not aware of the many programs available to them. If they were aware, the long application process across multiple applications was daunting and too time-consuming for busy parents. The reality that applicants might still be determined ineligible after the lengthy process to apply for programs further compounded the issues. In the end, many households were not applying for programs and ultimately not receiving aid that could significantly benefit their families.

In light of these issues, the state determined that the Universal Application project was necessary to best serve the families of Colorado. The state identified key goals in creating this project:

- Remove barriers to eligibility determination and reporting updates for eligible Coloradans
- Empower families to screen and apply for benefits and manage their own cases
- Increase visibility for all Early Childhood programs across government entities, localities, education institutions, and non-profit programs
- Increase efficiencies for county offices and medical assistance sites.

Utilizing the existing and very successful online Program Eligibility and Application Kit (PEAK), the state worked with eleven programs that varied from government agencies to non-profits to educational groups, and included programs spanning a wide variety of assistance. Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY), Parents as Teachers (PAT), Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), and Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) are just a few of the programs that joined together as part of the Universal Application.

Each program came together by setting aside their individual application processes and agreeing on a single point of entry that allows families to anonymously screen for eligibility -- PEAK. After receiving an eligibility determination, families can then decide whether or not to submit applications to the programs for which they were deemed eligible. The entire process is easily accessible by families, guides applicants smoothly through the intuitive process, and helps families efficiently allocate their valuable time in choosing what programs to apply for.

The State of Colorado is proud of the success it has achieved with the Universal Application. By saving families time, building awareness for early childhood programs across the state, and promoting good stewardship of the state's resources, Colorado has delivered a partnership solution that benefits all parties involved.



II. BUSINESS PROBLEM AND SOLUTION DESCRIPTION

The State of Colorado faced the ongoing challenge of how best to serve Colorado families. The key issues included raising awareness for the many programs a family might be eligible for, saving time and effort on behalf of these households, and using state resources responsibly in an effort to continuously improve.

Because each early childhood assistance program had an independent application process, families were accessing multiple services statewide through an array of disconnected avenues. Households were frustrated when forced to fill in the same information multiple times and wait for their eligibility determinations, meanwhile fearing that they might have wasted their time if found ineligible. Time, as well as paper resources, was also a concern from the state's perspective since the duplicative effort was a drain on resource allocation.

To solve these problems and improve the application experience for families statewide, Colorado sought to develop an inclusive online application that would combine each program's paper application into a single online process. In the spring of 2014, the state unveiled the plan to address these needs: an online early childhood program universal application that is easily accessible by families, school districts, and state agencies. This application would save families time, build awareness for each program it supported, and promote good stewardship of the state's resources. Known as the Universal Application, the concept was made a reality and centers on a single point of entry that allows families to anonymously screen themselves for eligibility. Based on feedback from the online application, families can then decide whether or not to submit an application for one or more services. The state executed this solution by leveraging its existing online self-service website, PEAK, to include early childhood assistance programs.

Colorado Universal Application, built upon the existing PEAK architecture, is a true three-tier (logical and physical), object-oriented implementation. The presentation layer was developed using Java Server Pages (JSP) and HTML and is delivered to the end user through an Internet browser such as Internet Explorer. The business object layer contains the business logic for the application. It was developed using JEE technology and implemented using an IBM WebSphere application server. The data access layer was developed using the Oracle 10g relational database management system.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

Coloradans needed better access and more options to determine their potential eligibility for early childhood assistance programs. The Universal Application allows citizens to screen for potential eligibility for myriad programs and apply for benefits through one unified interface -- www.colorado.gov/PEAK.



Inclusion of an increased number of programs in PEAK would create a greater awareness of what benefits are available to citizens in addition to allowing households to screen for multiple programs before filling out an application.

The following eleven early childhood assistance programs are available through the “Am I Eligible” screening tool on the PEAK website:

- Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Child Care Assistance
- Healthy Steps
- School Nutrition Programs
- Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)
- Parents as Teachers (PAT)
- Nurse Family Partnership (NFP)
- Head Start
- Preschool Special Education
- Early Intervention Colorado for Infants, Toddlers and Families (EI Colorado)
- Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP)

Colorado citizens can also electronically file completed applications for the following programs through the “Apply for Benefits” module:

- Child Care Assistance (CCCAP)
- Nurse Family Partnership (NFP)
- Head Start

The beneficiaries of an expanded and more streamlined self-assessment and application process include the citizens themselves, case workers, program administrators, and policy makers. As Coloradans are able to receive more accurate assessment results, they gain a better idea of what programs they may be eligible for, increasing the overall operational efficiency of the programs included in the tool.

IV. BENEFIT OF THE PROJECT

Coloradans experience a streamlined application process across multiple early childhood programs, by reducing the need to complete separate applications for each program. The system blends common data elements into a single process and then separates that data into the requisite information, sending the applicable data to each program. Families no longer have to fill out multiple paper applications and submit them individually, and programs will receive timely application information in a clean format.

Of the 1,238 applications submitted in relation to Universal Application programs through April 2015, a staggering 84 percent have included an application for another program. This truly depicts the system’s effectiveness of removing the siloed thought process of agencies and citizens when it comes to applying for benefits and shows the



time savings for Coloradans by not having to duplicate data across multiple paper applications.

The expansion of screening and application intake within the PEAK application to create a true Universal Application for early childhood programs includes the following benefits for applicants and recipients:

- Time and cost savings by initiating the application process from the comfort of their own home rather than traveling to an agency site
- Access to screening, application, checking benefits and reporting changes is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week; whereas agency offices are only open during business hours
- Application drafts are saved for 30 days, allowing applicants to apply online at times convenient for them without losing data
- Allowing clients to apply from a less stressful, more comfortable environment
- Access to multiple programs through a single application rather than multiple applications and multiple websites, saving the citizens time and effort
- Less overwhelming application process than a paper application; applicants see just one web page at a time
- PEAK, and Universal Application, is available in both English and Spanish

The Universal application has allowed each benefit program to bring their own unique set of technical and functional requirements surrounding eligibility criteria and determination to be presented to the end user (Colorado residents) as part of a single self-assessment and/or electronic application. PEAK allows for each program to implement its own specifications down to the data field level, but ultimately the citizen conducting a self-assessment or application is presented with one Universal Application.

Through April 2015, the number of households that were found to be potentially eligible for the Universal Application programs are broken down in the table below:

Program	Count
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children	1,118
Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters	312
Parents as Teachers	1,535
Nurse Family Partnership	135
Healthy Steps	962
Preschool Special Education	16



School Nutrition Programs	778
Head Start	359
Early Intervention	61
Low-Income Energy Assistance Program	778
Colorado Child Care Assistance Program	1,170

Through April 2015, the number of applications submitted* for the Universal Application related programs are broken down in the table below.

Program	Count
Colorado Child Care Assistance Program	900
Nurse Family Partnership	79
Head Start	259

*The PEAK system began accepting applications for these three programs recently:

- Colorado Child Care Assistance Program: 3/22/2015
- Nurse Family Partnership: 11/9/2014
- Head Start: 3/22/2015

