

Title: State of Ohio – Ohio Benefits Enterprise County
Readiness Network

Category: Cross-Boundary Collaboration and Partnerships

State: Ohio

Contact: Deven Mehta

Ohio Department of Administrative Services

Deven.mehta@das.ohio.gov

614-387-3007

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Executive Summary

Ohio is the seventh largest state in the United States, with a biennial budget of \$96.8 billion and serving more than 11.5 million citizens. In Ohio, administration of health and human services is spread across state and county organizations and counties have significant autonomy in the way services are delivered to their consumers. As in many other states, Ohio faces various challenges across a changing health and human services landscape that reinforces the need to increase program efficiency, and work collaboratively across state and local agencies to deliver critical services to customers.

To address these challenges, in 2013, the Governor's Office of Health Transformation initiated a modernization project to simplify state and local responsibility for eligibility determination, starting with updating its legacy eligibility systems. Throughout the Ohio Benefits project, the state successfully utilized boundary-breaking approaches that develop partnerships across multiple state agency partners and encourage cross-county collaboration to improve services and increase program efficiency. The Enterprise County Readiness Network was established to encourage cross agency participation and provide a mechanism to communicate early and often with end users.

The Readiness Network in Ohio has evolved since its inception in June 2013 to support implementation of its integrated eligibility system and facilitate a smooth technical and business process transition to approximately 5,100+ eligibility workers across the state. MAGI Medicaid implementation was the first phase of the project, followed by the remaining Medicaid programs and finally support for food assistance (SNAP) and cash assistance (TANF). The Readiness Network was solidified in October 2015 and is comprised of a "Readiness Manager" from each of Ohio's 88 counties. It facilitates communication about ongoing production changes as well as activities to support the remaining assistance program releases. Because administration of the state's Medicaid and SNAP/TANF programs are no longer managed with the same agency, the network also enables coordination between Ohio's Department of Medicaid (ODM) and Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and provides a unified forum for knowledge-sharing and collaboration. Readiness activities include weekly conference calls, monthly in-person meetings, and the tracking and completion of tasks associated with upcoming system releases. The Readiness Network also implemented a "Day on the Project" initiative where Readiness Managers are invited to spend a day at the Ohio Benefits project site in Columbus, OH to better understand the dynamics and intricacies of implementing a large eligibility system and the business processes that will support it.

A primary objective of the Readiness Network is the dissemination of key information, it was also developed to ensure that county workers have a venue to actively participate and provide input into Ohio Benefits. These cross-boundary, cross-county partnerships have enabled a fluid and integrated information exchange across all project stakeholders. Key information is communicated promptly and accurately to Readiness Managers and community partners which directly improves the delivery of benefits to Ohio's citizens. Furthermore, through the Readiness Network, the project is able to maintain a "pulse" on the Counties to proactively understand key pain points and areas that need to be addressed.

1. Concept

Business Problem

Ohio's ever-changing and challenging healthcare environment illuminates the state's need to improve delivery of health and human services program benefits and implement an integrated eligibility system to reduce costs, increase efficiency, and streamline service delivery.

Ohio operates in a state-supervised, county-administered system to deliver cash, food and medical assistance benefits. Each county has authority to manage these programs independently and the ways in which the programs are administered differ significantly from county to county. At the outset of the Ohio Benefits project, customers were required to seek services only in the county in which they resided and county organizations were generally not able to share resources across county boundaries. Differing applications submitted by both clients and qualified entities, coupled with county workers recording information in multiple systems, created data gaps that required painstaking resolution for accurate benefits to be paid. County workers did not have a statewide forum to collaboratively share concerns, ideas, and/or best practices to overcome these programmatic challenges. Additionally, some of Ohio's agencies pursued modernization efforts independently, but did not often find opportunities to work together to share leading practices or work towards mutually beneficial goals.

With so many stakeholders involved with a transformation effort as complex as the Ohio Benefits project, partnerships across county and state organizations to deliver services to customers and technology to support this collaboration were considered critical to the project's overall success. Given that the large, diverse group of stakeholders varied widely in needs, size, and knowledge, it was decided that a comprehensive, cross-collaborative communication and change management effort was also needed to best preparation all parties for the upcoming system changes.

Solution – Enterprise Change Readiness Network

The administrative autonomy of Ohio's counties present challenges to the management of large-scale change across technologies and business processes. Ohio Benefits project leadership understand that an approach that preserves county autonomy but also emphasizes opportunities to share best practices across the state is required for a successful statewide implementation. As such, the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), in conjunction with ODM and ODJFS, leads the organization and coordination effort along with representatives from the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association (OJFSDA). Established June 2013, the Enterprise County Readiness Network (Readiness Network) is comprised of county "Readiness Managers" that includes representation from each of Ohio's 88 counties. The Readiness Network helps prepare approximately 5,100 county workers for the initial implementation of the system which included eligibility determination for Ohio's MAGI Medicaid population and an interface with the federal health insurance marketplace.

Readiness Managers are educated on the importance of their role, responsibilities, and expectations. The Ohio Benefits project established weekly phone calls and monthly in-person meetings with the Readiness Network to share information and foster collaboration. Smaller working groups also met periodically. Organized by county size, these small groups collaborate on best practices and share strategies to use the system effectively.

Additional Opportunities for Counties and Agencies to Collaborate and Provide Feedback

Readiness Managers within the network also work closely with DAS, ODM, and Ohio Benefits project leadership and technology vendors to assist with user acceptance testing. In addition, targeted focus groups made up of Readiness Managers collaborate with developers to refine detailed system requirements, screen layouts, and suggest improvements in data accuracy and rules to sustain data integrity. County involvement has always been a project priority. In these new roles, Readiness Managers are better positioned to identify high-priority issues and defects and better able to share with their county peers' information about upcoming system efficiencies and the need for new business processes to align with these changes.

“Day on the Project” Initiative to Raise Awareness

The Readiness Network also includes a “Day on the Project” opportunity where Readiness Managers are invited to spend a day at the Ohio Benefits Project site in Columbus to better understand the dynamics and intricacies of implementing a large eligibility system. Readiness Managers are able to “choose their own adventure” and shadow full-time project members. They actively participate in system design sessions, training development meetings, and other cross-agency status meetings and are able to provide direct feedback and contribute new ideas. For Readiness Managers interested in participating in project activities beyond the Readiness Network, the Ohio Benefits project is able to establish a memorandum of understanding with their county and create a specialized “County Subject Matter Expert” part-time role for them on the project – thus solidifying additional opportunities for collaboration between the Counties and the state.

Innovative Readiness Network Features

Ohio Benefits project leadership learned from managing the Readiness Network experience that cross-collaborative partnerships produce far superior results when formalized into a program with specific activities, guiding principles, and roles. Innovative features of this Readiness Network include:

- Activities and communications tailored to be adaptable to different county sizes and cultures (task-based workloads, case-based workloads, shared services, etc).

- An Ohio Benefits project website for Readiness Managers that includes a comprehensive “readiness calendar” highlighting all readiness and testing activities, a running repository of readiness activity materials and job aids, an updated progress report that illustrates current project progress, and announcements that underscore the value of their participation.
- Sub-programs within the Readiness Network that allowed Readiness Managers to “choose their own adventure” and become more involved in the project decision-making processes by participating in:
 - system design sessions,
 - user acceptance testing,
 - statewide training development sessions,
 - other project management meetings.
- Additional activities prior to implementation to ensure that transition awareness was given top priority among competing meetings and initiatives. Specific implementation Readiness Manager Checklists are developed, along with reporting capabilities to track preparation and county readiness.

2. Significance of the Improvements to the Operation of Government

The cross-county partnerships and multi-agency collaborations fostered in part by the Readiness Network has resulted in increased cooperation and innovative solutions to address complex health and human services challenges. This influential instrument for consistent messaging across state agencies, county leadership, and an engaged and energized state workforce was – and continues to be – essential for sustaining success.

The establishment of a robust Readiness Network of change champions across 88 independent counties helped ensure a smooth implementation of technological, business process, and policy changes across the state. Moreover, this extensible Readiness Network infrastructure can be adapted for other technology projects – be it a multi-year, multi-program modernization project or a simpler technology upgrade. This network has set a new standard in change management and organizational readiness for the State of Ohio, demonstrating that cross-boundary collaboration increases adoption and advocacy for the new system when county readiness is considered with the same significance and criticality as system design, development, and testing. While it may seem easier for individual counties to create and manage their own strategies for adapting to new technology and operational changes, the Readiness Network collaboration effort demonstrated the significant benefits that synergies provide by sharing resources and identifying considerations together. The Readiness Network’s consistent calendar of activities – dedicated Readiness Calls and in-person Readiness Meetings and conferences – ensured that county champions always had a venue to voice their feedback, questions, and concerns, and that they had a “seat at the table” when it came to providing input regarding project planning and execution.

The Readiness Network objectives are also directly aligned with Governor Kasich and Ohio Health Transformation's 2015 strategic initiatives of reducing costs, improving health outcomes, and streamlining operational coordination across health and human services. Specifically, the Readiness Network helped reinforce:

- The importance of efficient and reliable information flows and established points-of-accountability when sharing new procedures and business processes
- The leveraging of existing technologies and reporting capabilities to utilize that data to better track and monitor outcomes and potential trouble areas

The Enterprise County Readiness Network also directly supports NASCIO's priorities of government excellence through quality business practices, technology modernization, cost containment, and information management by using cross-boundary collaboration and partnerships to promote innovative practices and cost-effective service to citizens.

3. Impact

Amidst a broader health services transformation, Ohio strategically demonstrates cross-boundary partnerships and inter-agency collaboration to streamline health and human services program implementation and better serve residents. As part of these collaborative efforts, the State benefits from:

- Reduction of siloed service delivery
- Improved avenues for customer data sharing and communication across counties and agencies
- Leveraging technology to improve access to care for specific under-served populations

The Enterprise County Readiness Network is fundamental to the project's collaborative efforts to prepare over 5,100+ eligibility workers (and approximately 7,500 system users overall) in the transition from a legacy system to an innovative, web-based platform. The Readiness Network maintains a unique structure to quickly and accurately inform a wide variety of stakeholders and partners with the goal of providing Ohio's residents with simple, stress-free access to care. Since the project's inception in October 2013:

- **2,414,496** individuals applied for Medicaid benefits through Ohio Benefits
- **95%** of all applicants have been processed
- **1.7 million** individuals have been converted from the legacy system
- **33** major system upgrades including system enhancements have been released to help Ohio automate business processes

Recognizing its value, Ohio continues to utilize its robust change network of cross-county Readiness Managers to support additional system implementations and upgrades. As new programs are added to the system, increased staff involvement means greater awareness of the hot-topic issues within counties. Through this

Readiness Network, county workers are empowered to ask questions and are given the ability to seek assistance amongst their peers to solve problems. In addition, project-facilitated networking events provide ongoing opportunities for counties to share best practices and learn from their peers across the state.

The Readiness Network is not simply a one-way line to disseminate critical information, but rather provides the county workers with a forum in which to actively participate in the design, development, and preparation of project activities and initiatives. In this sense, the Readiness Network demonstrates that county stakeholder involvement is on equal footing with system development. DAS, ODM, ODJFS, project leadership, Readiness Managers, and technology vendors contribute equally to a singular goal: providing Ohioans with the access to the care they need.