Virtualizing Disaster SNAP

The innovation behind the no-touch determination and disbursement of Disaster SNAP during a pandemic

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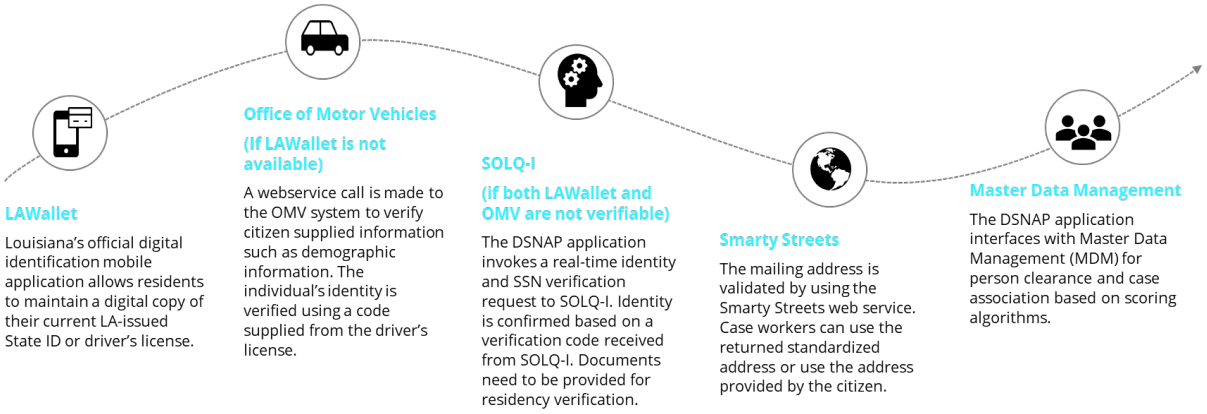
Executive Summary

> *Hurricanes are dangerous things, and they're no fun to go through. And if you come out of it in one piece and your house comes out of in one piece, it's no fun living with no electricity for a day or a week, a month, whatever it is.*
>
> - Bernard Goldberg

The 2020 hurricane season brought new challenges to Louisiana as the state was confronted with navigating the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic. An abnormally active hurricane season and an ongoing pandemic required a fast, safe and virtual response for disbursing Disaster SNAP (DSNAP) benefits to millions of residents. To prepare for the hurricane season, the State prioritized minimizing the need for in-person contact. The virtual approach to Disaster SNAP pioneered a minimal to no-touch process utilizing a range of innovative technologies.



The DSNAP Worker Portal, built utilizing the Salesforce platform, facilitates workload and case management, intake/registration, eligibility, correspondence, reports, benefit management, and document management. An intelligent driver flow presents case workers with relevant screens required to complete a variety of tasks. Additionally, the Worker Portal includes general functionality such as connectivity with a citizen-facing Self-Service Portal (SSP) for pre-registrations, Master Data Management (MDM) integration for individual clearance, data sharing with Integrated Eligibility system portals, data, integration with State Data Exchanges, and utilizes the State's Enterprise Architecture components.

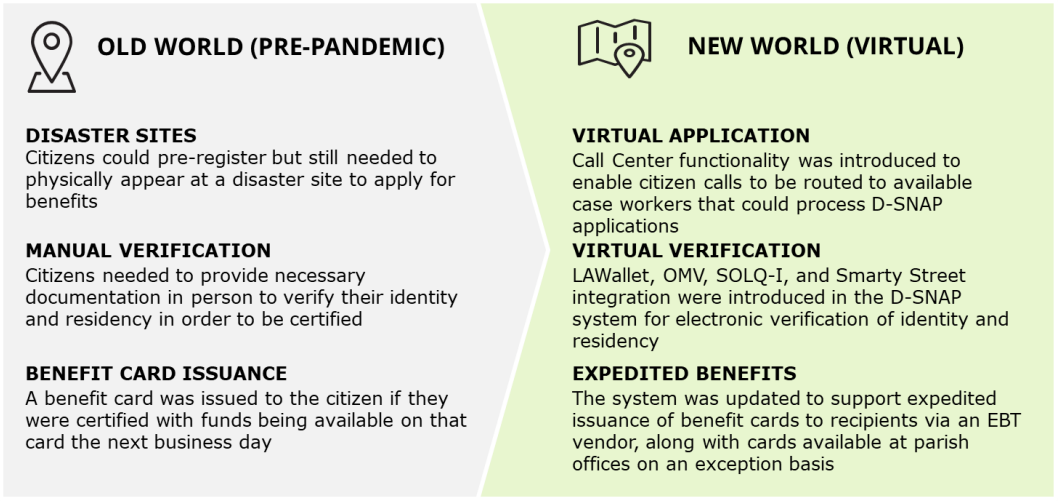
Purpose Driven Implementation

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of state governments. It forced the world to go virtual, and we obliged. The State of Louisiana is a pioneer as the only state to implement a virtual approach for DSNAP in support of disasters amid a pandemic, processing over 120k applications and providing over $72M in assistance to citizens.

Concept

The concept of a virtual approach to DSNAP emerged with the COVID pandemic, which established a need for minimal-to-no-touch interactions. To prevent the spread of the virus, citizens could no longer go to disaster sites in order to register and provide the identity and residency verification for DSNAP benefits. The

virtualization concept was implemented when Louisiana was threatened by two concurrent hurricanes in August 2020.



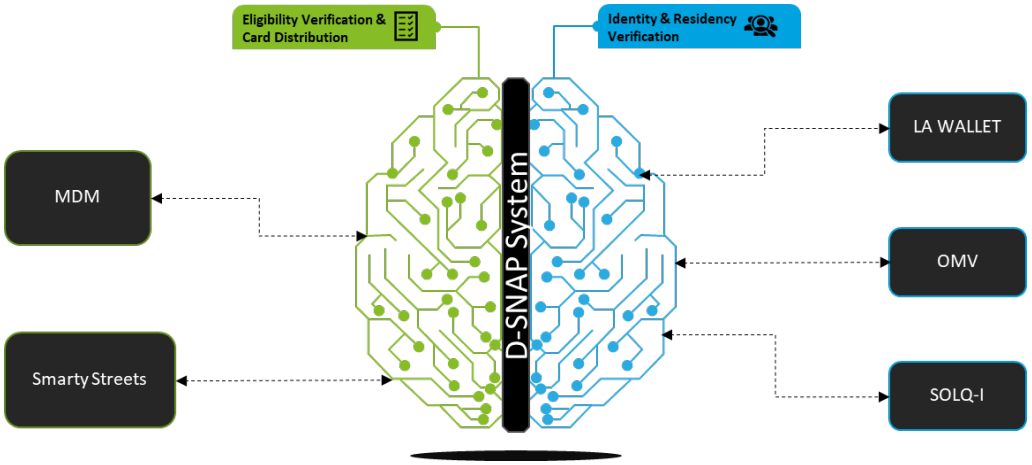
It is important to understand the previous DSNAP process across the State in order to realize the need for a different approach due to the pandemic. The Office of Technology Services (OTS), the State Information Technology group, stores hundreds of laptops in a Baton Rouge warehouse to be transported when needed at disaster sites. These laptops need to be maintained, updated and validated to ensure that they are ready for use once a disaster is declared. Once a disaster is declared for certain parishes, suitable locations have to be procured for use as disaster sites and then State personnel have to:

- Provide the logistics necessary to transport laptops and printers to the sites;
- Tents and other shelter need to be set up if necessary;
- Ensure that necessary power, water and internet access is available;
- Procure site security;
- Provide water, parking areas, seating for applicants and bathrooms;
- Set up case worker stations with required workstations and collateral;
- Transport benefit cards to be handed out to citizens;
- Schedule case workers to staff the disaster site, provide meals and housing;

The above items, along with the hundreds of other tasks necessary to successfully provide DSNAP services for affected citizens at disaster sites, took extensive planning and required significant staffing. The planning for these tasks was sometimes further complicated by the scope of the disaster which could involve needing generators, cellular cradle points and other services when infrastructure at the available disaster site was compromised. The immediate concern with the above process was that it brought a large number of affected citizens in close contact with each other along with case workers and support staff in the middle of a pandemic.

The State needed an innovative technology solution that could make “contactless” DSNAP into an immediate reality. This goal started an extensive three-week effort to virtualize the DSNAP verification and distribution processes, by integrating state-of-the-art technologies within the current DSNAP system. Literally overnight, data sharing agreements were put into place and integration with LA Wallet, OMV, SOLQ-I and Smarty Street were added to the DSNAP system for electronic verification of identity and address validations, as well as the modifications necessary for EBT card distribution and benefit disbursement.

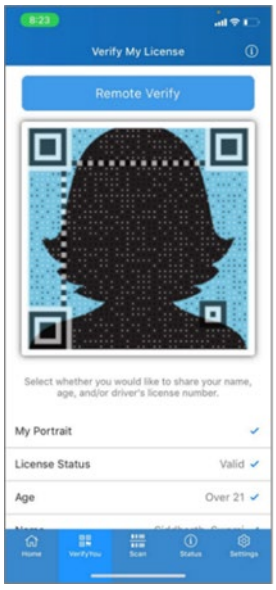
Identity & Residency Verification

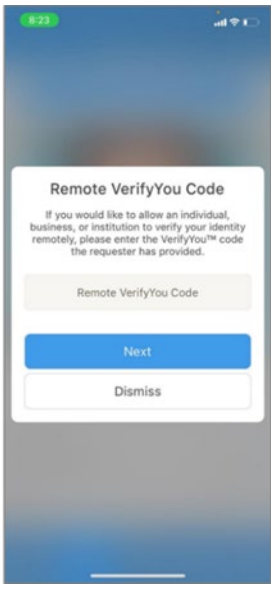


The first consideration of the virtualized approach is identity and residency verification. The ability to verify an applicant quickly and accurately is a vital component for benefits processing. Implementing a streamlined and efficient verification process was at the top of the priority list, and integration with LA Wallet and State Office of Motor Vehicle (OMV) systems were the digital verification sources employed to verify an individual's identity and residency. In cases where LA Wallet and OMV failed to verify an individual, or if the individual opted out of verification using these technologies, the SOLQ-I service was utilized for remote identify verification. Integrating with a third-party verification service sped up the process by allowing for interactive verification and allowed for faster onboarding of clients without having to spend precious time checking documents.

LA Wallet Integration

LA Wallet is Louisiana's Digital Driver's License, made available to the public by the Office of Motor Vehicles. It is the first digital driver's license application to be fully launched by any State in the United States. It was the perfect choice for verification as it not only fulfilled the requirement for real-time verification, but it was also available at no cost to the public since the State also suspended the usage fee for all citizens. VerifyYou is a unique feature of the app that allows a caseworker to remotely validate a license holder using the LA Wallet mobile application. Once an applicant validates via a verification code, DSNAP case workers can validate the full name, driver's license number, address, and date of birth. Integrating with LA Wallet resulted in significant validation success even during the initial adaptation phase, with over 20% of the applicants choosing to use the LA Wallet App to verify identity and address.





Office of Motor Vehicles (OMV) Integration

Applicants that did not have access to the LA Wallet mobile application had to provide their driver's license information to the DSNAP case worker to validate using the integration with OMV systems. The case workers

have the ability to enter the Driver's License Number, Audit Number and Name of the individual (as it appears exactly on the License) for a web service call to OMV. OMV returns the data immediately which is displayed on the screen to the DSNAP users. This includes the Full Name, DOB, Drivers' License Number, Expiration Date, Address and the Parish Code, which is used for identity & parish verification.

SOLQ-I Integration

Applicants who could not be validated using the LA Wallet or OMV systems are validated using the federal SOLQ-I system via real-time integration. Since the SOLQ-I system only provides identity verification, the applicant had to provide other documentation virtually to verify their identity and address information.

Person Clearance using Local Search & Master Data Management

While adding a new member to a household, the worker utilizes the Local Search feature to check if the member is already known to the Salesforce system. Based on the Local Search results, case worker can determine if the SSN for a household member can be finalized or needs to be updated. Additionally, it also performs a duplicate check for any existing individual with the same demographics in Salesforce repository. The DSNAP application also interfaces with Master Data Management (MDM) for individual clearance using the Enterprise Master Person Index (MPI). The MDM returns possible matches back to the DSNAP application, to associate the individual to an existing application or case, based on the MDM match score. For clients without SSN, if the Household member cannot be found in either search methods based on other demographics, a Pseudo SSN is assigned.

Address Verification & Mailing Address Updates

The Smarty Streets Web Service was integrated for mailing address verification of all DSNAP applicants. Case workers had the ability to use the USPS formatted address returned by the web service call or to proceed with the address provided by the applicant. All addresses verified by Smarty Streets were automatically considered for expedited EBT card processing, which delivered the cards via overnight shipping. Addresses that not verified and all P.O. Box addresses were mailed out as non-expedited cards. A mechanism was implemented to deliver cards to the applicants' nearest parish office for homeless citizens and applicants who lost their homes during the disaster.

Duplicate Participation Check for SNAP Benefits

The DSNAP application interfaces with IE system to identify individuals who have received SNAP benefits during the same benefit period, prior to approving DSNAP benefits. When a case is created, the household members listed during registration, are included in the case. The duplicate participation check is triggered on case creation and submission of the case for each case member. The DSNAP application also interfaces with NAC to identify individuals who have received benefits from other states during the same benefit period. The NAC web service sends additional details for every match and this data is recorded in DSNAP under duplicate participation. The individuals receiving SNAP benefits can be excluded and the remaining household members can be issued DSNAP benefits.

Virtual Card Distribution & Benefit Disbursement

In addition to the existing functionality to receiving EBT cards over the counter at a parish office or disaster site, the DSNAP system was upgraded to support virtual issuance of EBT cards to recipients via an EBT vendor. The DSNAP portal integrated with the SNAP IE system to recognize the type of card being requested for each case, virtual vs. over the counter, as well as expedited vs. non-expedited, and relay that information to the EBT

vendor. This functionality of virtual case certification and benefit issuance along with associated call center functionality to route applicant calls to case workers is a unique DSNAP implementation.

Significance & Impact

To discuss the impact of virtualizing DSNAP, we must first set the stage for the unique situation that Louisiana faced. In August 2020, citizens of Louisiana faced a potential catastrophe with two dangerous hurricanes, Marco and Laura, bearing down on coastal parishes. While Hurricane Marco weakened and turned away from Louisiana, Hurricane Laura grew stronger and developed into a category 4 storm. On August 27th, Hurricane Laura, with sustained 150 MPH windspeeds, was the strongest hurricane to ever make landfall in Louisiana since 1856. Hurricane Laura caused catastrophic damage to southwestern, central, and Northern Louisiana impacting tens of thousands of people across 32 parishes.

3 Week Implementation

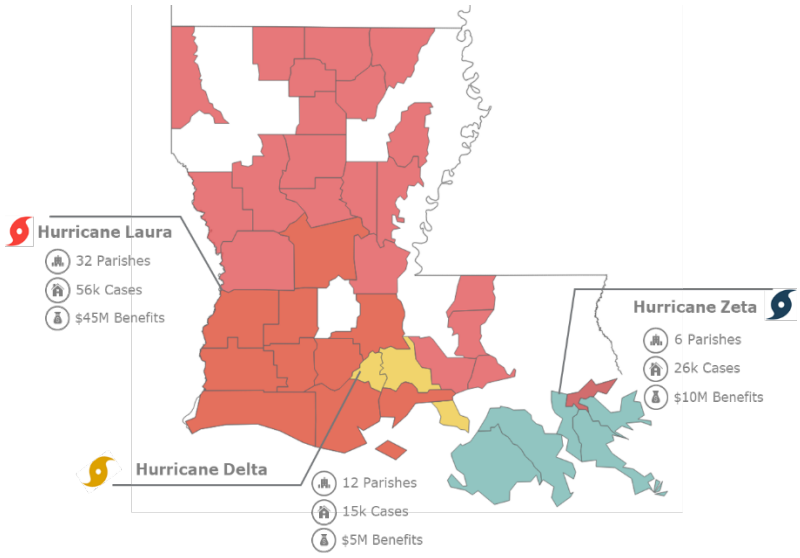
120,000+ Applications

900,000+ LAWallet App downloads

$72 Million disbursed in Disaster SNAP benefits

The disaster recovery effort in the aftermath of Hurricane Laura, amid ongoing COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, drove the urgent need for a virtual approach to DSNAP. With the dedication and collaboration across multiple agencies and vendors, the DSNAP system integrated virtual verification and benefit disbursement within three weeks and provided much needed support for citizens residing in declared disaster areas.

This approach to “contactless” DSNAP not only removed the need for physical interaction between citizens and State workers during the pandemic but also eliminated the effort and associated costs to transport material and staff to stand up disaster sites.

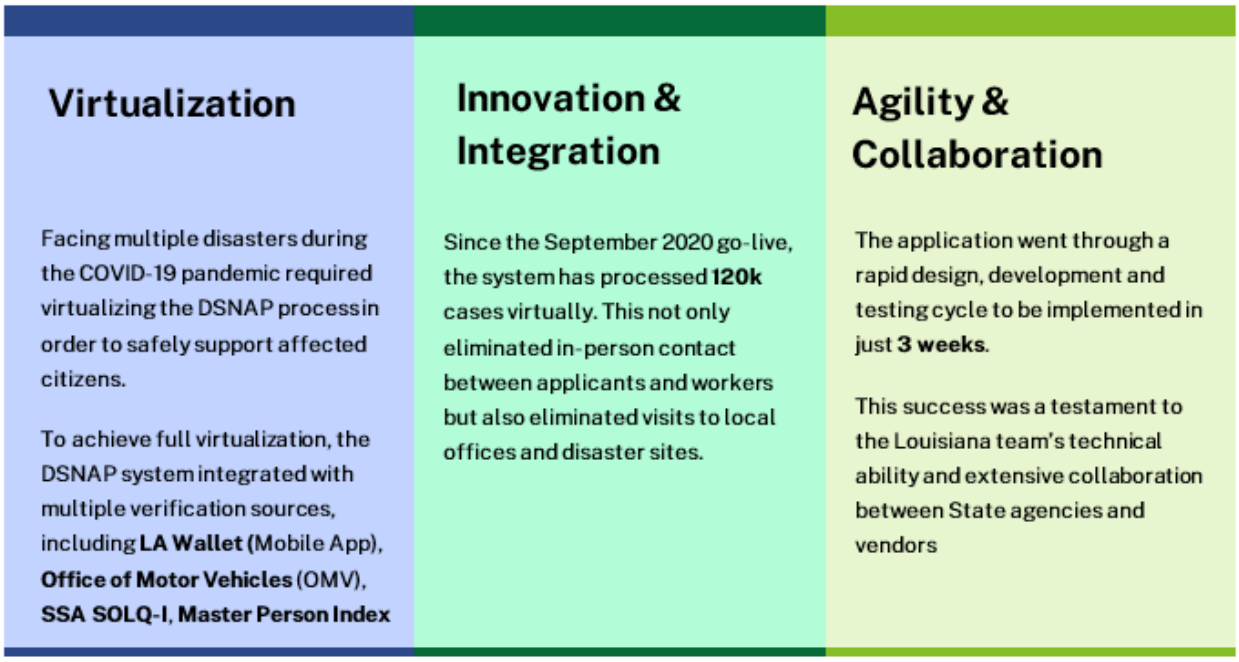


The 2020 hurricane season was especially disastrous for Louisiana with at least six named storms declared as federal disasters. This was a record-setting hurricane season with the most landfalls in a single state in a single season. After Hurricane Laura, Hurricane Delta and Zeta made landfall in Louisiana during early and late October and also prompted DSNAP disaster declarations. These two hurricanes damaged parishes that were still recovering from Hurricane Laura, but also impacted seven other parishes. The three hurricanes caused over $20 billion dollars in combined damage.

In addition, a winter storm affected Louisiana between Feb 11 and Feb 19, 2021, bringing snow, hail and freezing rain across the state. Another DSNAP was activated for citizens who were in dire need of assistance for

temporary housing, home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, and for business owners to recover from the effects of this disaster.

Since the launch of the virtual approach to DSNAP, the system has provided an efficient platform for citizens to apply, get verified and approved for benefits. The system processed over 120K applications and distributed over $72M in benefits across four DSNAP events, Hurricane Laura, Hurricane Delta, Hurricane Zeta, and the Winter Storm of 2021. These benefits were distributed with significant cost savings to the State due to not having to stand up disaster sites, transport workstations, provide infrastructure, security and other logistics. The State costs for the "contactless" DSNAP necessary for Hurricane Laura, including the required call center infrastructure for case workers, was about 50% of the cost of comparable disasters utilizing the previous approach. The DSNAP costs for Hurricanes Delta and Zeta were about 20% and 10% of previous costs since the call routing infrastructure was already in place. The virtual approach to DSNAP played a pivotal role in helping the State provide for citizens navigating these difficult times.



At its core, the DSNAP system provides a robust solution that allow citizens to apply for and receive disaster benefits in a contactless manner. The DSNAP system not only streamlined the application, verification and benefit issuance processes, but also helped contain the spread of COVID-19. It not only succeeded in delivering tangible cost savings and process improvements, but also provided peace of mind to citizens and workers.

Additional Resources

https://gov.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/Letters/laura/JBE-Donald-Trump-Declaration.pdf

https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/events

https://www.wwltv.com/article/weather/hurricane/trump-approves-disaster-declaration/289-2743acaa-15ab-4a7a-871f-c368d647f709