

State: Arizona

Agency: Department of Child Safety (DCS)

Award Category: Enterprise IT Management

Project Title: CORE – Connectivity Optimization & Resilience Enhancement

Project Dates: January 2023 – April 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & PROJECT DESCRIPTION

IDEA (25%)

What problem or opportunity does the project address?

The Department of Child Safety (DCS) identified an urgent need to modernize and optimize its network infrastructure and connectivity landscape. The agency was managing fragmented telecom contracts, underutilized network ports, and a cumbersome asset management process. These inefficiencies limited the department's ability to deliver mission-critical child welfare services at scale and in real time. The Connectivity Optimization & Resilience Enhancement (CORE) initiative was conceived by DCS Chief Technology Officer Aashana Dhankher to address these challenges head-on.

CORE streamlines enterprise telecom assets, consolidates vendor contracts, and closes unused network ports to reduce vulnerabilities and increase efficiency. Additionally, automated asset management ensures inventory accuracy and maintains operational readiness. These changes improve staff performance, reduce risk, and enhance DCS's digital infrastructure—all essential for better serving vulnerable children and families across Arizona.

Why does it matter?

DCS must operate with maximum efficiency and accuracy to protect Arizona's most at-risk populations. A fragmented telecom and asset environment imposed excessive operational costs and delays. Without addressing these issues, the agency risked increasing downtime, data security threats, and resource waste.

By implementing CORE, DCS:

- Achieved \$1.3 million in cost savings through vendor consolidation and port control
- Reduced risks tied to abandoned network ports
- Increased asset visibility and audit readiness
- Empowered frontline staff with faster, more reliable technology access

This transformation allowed DCS to do more with less—freeing up funds for services while making its technology backbone more resilient and adaptable.

What makes it different?

Unlike traditional IT consolidation efforts that focus on just procurement or telecom, CORE is an integrated, CTO-led strategy blending automation, infrastructure resilience, and cybersecurity. It is not a "lift and shift" model, it is an intelligent recalibration of how infrastructure supports frontline human services. Aashana Dhankher's leadership unified disparate teams under a shared goal: operational excellence aligned with DCS's mission.

What makes it universal?

CORE tackles universal state-level IT challenges, aligning with multiple State CIO Top Ten Priorities: Cloud & Infrastructure, IT Budget & Cost Control, and Cybersecurity & Risk Management. All states face the need to optimize IT spending, consolidate contracts, and secure data, especially within health and human services. Arizona's blueprint is scalable and shareable nationwide.

IMPLEMENTATION (25%)

What was the roadmap?

CORE fits into the DCS enterprise IT modernization framework. It was structured into three phases: Assessment & Inventory, Infrastructure Optimization, and Automation & Security. Under Aashana Dhankher's direction, DCS adopted an agile project management approach with clear benchmarks and KPIs.

CORE success was measured by three key outcomes:

- Reduction in redundant or underutilized network ports
- Consolidation of telecom providers
- Implementation of automated asset management workflows

Who was involved?

Led by CTO Aashana Dhankher, this project united the Office of the CIO, DCS Infrastructure & Security teams, finance officers, and telecom vendors. Stakeholder buy-in was obtained via structured change management, including business case presentations, operational impact workshops, and clear, metric-driven updates to executive leadership.

Communication played a pivotal role. A multi-tier outreach plan included:

- Internal dashboards for leadership tracking
- Email campaigns to regional offices
- User training materials and quick-start guides for asset tracking

How did you do it?

Resources included:

- **Financial:** Leveraged existing budget lines for telecom and infrastructure
- **Human:** Dedicated project manager, infrastructure engineers, and analysts
- **Time:** Executed over a 12-month phased roadmap, with sprints focused on telecom audits, policy changes, and tool deployment

The technical architecture emphasized secure, cloud-based asset management tools integrated with DCS's core IT systems, supported by network-level analytics to detect and disable unused ports. Security protocols were aligned with DCS cybersecurity frameworks.

IMPACT (50%)

What did the project make better?

Prior to CORE, DCS faced a disjointed infrastructure model. Staff often experienced delays due to misrouted telecom services and asset mismanagement. High costs were the norm due to overlapping vendor contracts and active but unused network ports.

Post-CORE, DCS achieved:

- **\$1.3M in savings** from contract consolidation and proactive port management
- **25% faster provisioning** of devices and network access to staff
- **15% reduction in audit remediation** efforts related to asset visibility
- Enhanced security posture through closure of 100% unused ports identified

These changes allowed DCS to reallocate savings toward direct services—delivering real, measurable impact for Arizona children and families.

How do you know?

The success of CORE was validated through quantitative and qualitative measures:

- Budget analysis showing 7-figure cost savings
- User satisfaction feedback from staff noting faster device delivery and fewer service tickets
- IT audit scores showing improved compliance post-automation

A frontline manager shared: “Before CORE, getting a laptop took weeks. Now, it’s days, and it works right out of the box. That makes all the difference in helping kids faster.”

What now?

CORE is now embedded in DCS operations. Governance policies mandate quarterly network reviews and ongoing provider optimization. The agency has also built a framework to replicate this strategy for software license management and mobile device control.

The initial investment yielded exceptional ROI and helped create a sustainable, efficient, and secure infrastructure. As Aashana Dhankher notes, “Every dollar saved is a dollar that can go back into protecting Arizona’s children.”

That’s why CORE isn’t just a tech project: it’s a mission accelerator.