Coordinating Human Services Programs with Health Reform Implementation

A Toolkit for State Agencies

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, located in Washington, D.C., is a non-profit research and policy institute that conducts research and analysis of government policies and the programs and public policy issues that affect low and middle-income households. The Center is supported by foundations and individual contributors.

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Staff Readiness

Background

Well-designed policies, processes, and technology tools are important to ensure that a service delivery system is administratively efficient and effectively connects eligibility low-income families and individuals to benefits. A crucial element of successful implementation, however, will be preparing agency staff to take on new roles and responsibilities. They must understand their agency's goal, their personal role, and their performance expectations in order for the new system to work. This is always true when large-scale change is anticipated, such as the rollout of required changes to Medicaid in 2014 and even more true when complex multi-program systems changes will be undertaken, such as program integration. This section contains key questions related to defining roles, staff performance expectations, supervisory expectations, and training that your state's implementation of eligibility and enrollment under health reform will require.

As states consider how best to implement changes to their eligibility and enrollment systems required by health reform, they may be considering an entirely new way of doing business. As discussed in the Eligibility module, the new law provides an opportunity for states to consider their business model. And, many states have already had significant success in improving their efficiency with different approaches to processing eligibility. New business processes, IT systems, electronic case files, and better sources of electronic verification have allowed states to design their service delivery models in more flexible ways. Some states have moved away from traditional case management models, where staff carry a fixed caseload and are responsible for all components of eligibility determination for their clients. New service delivery models include universal caseloads where tasks can be assigned to any qualified worker in the state or county, task-based work models in which workers specialize in a part of the eligibility process rather than carrying an alpha-caseload, and regional or centralized services like call centers and centralized mailrooms. For example, electronic case files and offering interviews or customer assistance by telephone give states the flexibility to organize their work regionally or in a centralized processing center. Work can be assigned to units with more current capacity, unlike under the more traditional case management model where work volume depends on who comes through the local office door on a given day. The new business models require rethinking staffing methods, training, and performance management.

While modern systems and business processes are giving states more flexibility to respond creatively to increasing workloads, they also require highly trained staff who have the knowledge and confidence to adapt to the flexible system when their job duties change. This is especially important when considering how to approach program integration. It's possible to have an integrated system from the client's perspective, but split the eligibility determination among workers who specialize by program. But program specialists need to know enough about other benefit programs that they can connect clients who aren't participating, and they need to have the training to be able to be reassigned to another program depending on workload.

Once agencies have made decisions about their new business processes, they will need to think about how to prepare staff and supervisors for their new roles. A staff readiness plan typically addresses staff roles and responsibilities, staff performance management, training needs, and supervisor readiness.

- **Staff roles and responsibilities.** Staff roles and responsibilities are usually defined by position descriptions and organizational structure. Traditionally, eligibility and enrollment job classifications include clerical staff, eligibility specialists, lead workers, and supervisors. States that have redesigned their business processes use the same positions, but redefine the roles. For example, clerical staff who are no longer needed to support case workers now work in centralized mail processing units or answer basic questions through a toll-free customer service center. The role of eligibility specialists also changes dramatically in new business models. For example, rather than working on all aspects of eligibility, staff in some task-based business processes specialize in intake interviews in storefronts or toll-free phone intake centers, or conduct batch processing in case maintenance units.

- **Supervisor readiness.** Preparing supervisors for change is especially critical, as they will be primarily responsible for helping their staff successfully transition. In addition to training on policy and process changes, they will likely need to gain new skills related to balancing work among new work units. To be successful, task-based models require close teamwork among unit supervisors in order to flex the model as the workload shifts, which may require new skills. They will also need to be trained in using new data and reports to effectively manage staff performance. Supervisory training is typically delivered first, and should include information on how to help staff cope with change.
- **Staff performance management.** When states change their business models, they also need to change the way they assess performance. Traditionally, staff performance is measured at annual reviews and focuses on a few objective measures of performance like case accuracy and caseloads, attendance, and interpersonal skills. A newer approach to measuring staff performance in a task-based work model is to focus on customer service and performance measures of productivity by measuring things like the number of completed tasks *per worker per day*. Agencies using this approach have not replaced their annual review processes, but have refocused them on measuring staff success at providing excellent customer service and connecting eligible people to benefits quickly. If productivity is being measured daily, then the annual review can be a time to focus on the employee's development needs and career goals, and how much they contribute to the agency's core mission and goals.
- **Training needs.** A good staff training plan includes an inventory of staff training needs, an outline of the curriculum that will address the needs, a description of the training delivery methods and activities, and timeline for training delivery. In addition to the state's business model for health reform, staff will need training on new IT systems, new Medicaid policies, and changes to their business processes. They will likely also need additional "soft skills" training. Soft skills training for staff could include the agency's new customer service philosophy and standards, coping with change, being a good team player, and dealing with difficult customers. Supervisor training is an important part of a state's approach, as well.

Goals

This module will help states:

- Assess their current staffing, including types and number of positions, workload and performance expectations, and training plan.
- Convene a group of people to make recommendations on changes needed to current position descriptions, performance expectations, and organizational structure.
- Develop the framework of a training plan for eligibility staff and supervisors.

Tools

This module includes the following tools:

1. **Exercise 5.1:** Assess your current staffing model

2. **Exercise 5.2:** Host a staff readiness planning meeting

3. **Wrap-Up and Next Steps:** Outline a training plan for staff and supervisors

How to Complete This Module

This module provides you with tools and suggestions for a guided process you can use to review your current staffing model and prepare the people in your organization for changes in their job duties. This tool is designed to be used after you have a good sense of your future eligibility and renewal practices.

Operational managers and representatives of each of the job classifications that will be affected are the most important stakeholders to involve in developing your staff readiness plan. You will also want to involve your human resources department and labor relations specialists if you have collective bargaining agreements that will be affected. It would be advisable to invite policy experts who have been involved in the workgroups that have redesigned your service delivery model as a resource for the discussions.

To complete the exercises, we recommend that you gather the following information and have it available as a resource:

- Current position descriptions for eligibility and clerical staff, including knowledge, skills and abilities required, if available
- Current organizational charts and staffing levels
- Current staffing performance reports and tools — such as annual review forms
- Current training curriculum outline, training plan, and evaluation data, if available
- High-level picture of new service delivery model for health and human services
- Input from eligibility and clerical field staff

Exercise 5.1

Assess your current staffing model

The goal of this exercise is to help you gather data that will help paint a picture of your current staffing model so you can more easily identify components that will need to change or evolve to prepare for the changes in Medicaid and human services eligibility.

This exercise is intended to be completed prior to convening a group of experts and stakeholders to develop your staff readiness plan. It can be completed by the project manager and one or more people who have subject matter expertise as a "homework" assignment, or the project manager may choose to convene a pre-meeting with a small group of experts in HR and training to complete the exercise together.

5.1A Questions on the Current Staffing Model

Key Questions 1: *What positions and/or classifications are currently being used to staff your eligibility work (e.g., clerical, eligibility specialists, generalists, specialized by program, combination, etc.)?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 2: *What are the job duties for each classification? What are the associated competencies needed for those job duties?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 3: *What are the staffing levels for those positions? What is the average caseload per worker?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 4: *Are those levels sufficient to meet your performance standards or goals? On average, how many tasks are staff able to complete per day/week/month?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 5: *Do you have contracted staff? If so, how are responsibilities divided between in-house and contracted staff?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 6: *How are staff positions funded (e.g., funding sources, cost allocation)?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 7: *How are staff trained on program changes now?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 8: *Who provides the training?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 9: *If you have staff who specialize in one program (such as CHIP, Medicaid, or SNAP), do they receive any training in other programs?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 10: *What are your current performance expectations for staff (if any)?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 11: *How is worker performance monitored? How often is performance reviewed? What elements of performance are monitored? Who is responsible for completing the review process?*

Key Discussion Points:

5.1B Questions on Current Responsibilities and Training of Supervisors

Key Questions 12: *Which classifications or positions currently have responsibility to supervise eligibility staff? Do offices use team leaders and how does this role differ from that of a supervisor?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 13: *What are the staffing levels for those positions? Are those levels sufficient to support staff and meet performance expectations?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 14: *What tools are supervisors using to manage staff performance?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 15: *How well do supervisors manage change now? Are they generally fatigued or energized by change?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 16: *What training is provided for supervisors now?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 17: *Are supervisors cross-trained in all programs?*

Key Discussion Points:

Exercise 5.2

Host a staff readiness planning meeting

The goal of this exercise is to guide a discussion about the design of your new staffing model with a workgroup of stakeholders. The outcome of the meeting will be a set of answers to important questions that will help you complete other readiness tasks, like editing position descriptions, developing new performance expectations, and identifying training needs.

Begin the meeting by reviewing the results of Exercise 5.1 where you answered questions about your current staffing model. You may also want to review the high-level design of your future service delivery model. Then use the questions below to facilitate a conversation with workgroup members about options for your future staffing model.

5.2A Discussion Questions on Developing the Future Model

Key Questions 18: *What eligibility worker classifications do you plan to use (e.g., clerical, eligibility specialists, generalists, specialized by program, combination, etc.)?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 19: *What are the job duties of the redefined classifications? Are they changed from current duties? If so, how are they changed?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 20: *How many staff will be needed to ensure access to programs and compliance with performance standards and benchmarks?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 21: *What are target staffing levels for those positions?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 22: *What is the target average caseload per worker in a case management model?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 23: *In a task-based work model, what productivity measures will you use? What are your targets?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 24: *How will productivity expectations change over time as the process gets more efficient?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 25: *Is there a need for contracted staff? If so, how will responsibilities be divided between agency and contracted staff?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 26: *Where will staff be located?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 27: *How will staff be funded (e.g. funding sources, cost allocation)?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 28: *What will be the performance expectations for staff? How will performance be monitored?*

Key Discussion Points:

5.2B Discussion Questions on Responsibilities and Training of Supervisors in the Future Model

Key Questions 29: *Which classifications or positions will be responsible for supervising eligibility staff?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 30: *What will supervisor job duties include in the future?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 31: *What is the ideal supervisor-to-worker ratio? Is that realistic, especially during transition?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 32: *What is the plan to prepare supervisors to help staff cope with change?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 33: *What training will be provided to supervisors?*

Key Discussion Points:

Key Questions 34: *What tools will be provided to help supervisors monitor staff performance?*

Key Discussion Points:

Wrap-up and Next Steps

Outline a training plan for staff and supervisors

It can be tempting to plan for training related to major changes as a single event, e.g., a two-part training that will review new eligibility changes and the associated computer systems skills course to support the change. However, it is wise to plan for training as an ongoing business function, which involves thinking about how new staff will be trained in the future, how refresher training will be provided for current staff, and how quality improvement will be addressed through ongoing training. The timing of training is also important to consider. Technical training delivered too early isn't effective because staff forget what they've learned if they aren't able to practice soon after. Soft skills training should be delivered first so staff better understand why their jobs are changing and are prepared for technical training.

The goal of this exercise is to help you develop an outline of a training plan that will prepare and support staff and supervisors to transition to your new staffing model. This is not a training plan, but will help a workgroup of training, operations, and policy experts make high-level decisions that can later be developed into an agency training plan. Completing the table below could be accomplished in a two- or three-hour workgroup meeting. It would be helpful to have a copy of the current staff training plan (if one exists) as a reference.

Outline of Training Plan

Position/ Classification	Skills Needed	Priority (High, Medium, Low)	Timeline (Date Needed)	Delivery Method	Resource (In-House, Contracted)
Ex: Intake eligibility staff	Multi-program eligibility policies	High	Oct 2013	Classroom	Agency training unit
	IT systems training	High	Dec 2013	Classroom	Systems vendor
	Effective Interviewing	Medium	Mar 2014	Workshop with practice	University X
	Dealing with difficult people	Low	Jun 2014	Online	Consultant Y
Ex: Supervisors	Multi-program eligibility policies	High	Aug 2013	Classroom	Agency training unit
	IT systems training	High	Dec 2013	Classroom	Systems vendor
	Effective delegation	Medium	Jan 2014	Classroom	Department of Personnel training
	Using data to monitor performance	Medium	Jun 2014	Online with practice	Consultant X
	Change management	Medium	Jul 2013	Workshop with peer groups	Consultant X

Resources

Exchange Eligibility Final Rule 45 CFR Parts 155, 156, and 157 "Establishment of Exchanges and Qualified Health Plans; Exchange Standards for Employers," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, March 27, 2012,
http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-03-27/pdf/2012-6125.pdf.

Medicaid Eligibility Final Rule 42 CFR Parts 431, 433, 435, and 457 "Medicaid Program: Eligibility Changes Under the Affordable Care Act of 2010," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, March 16, 2012, http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-03-23/html/2012-6560.htm.

Principles of Adult Learning: http://wcwpds.wisc.edu/related-training/mandated-reporter/resources/adult_learning.pdf.