



Title: Michigan Mi-Bridges Self Service Portal
Category: Digital Government: Government to Citizen
State: Michigan

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Completion Dates:

Phase 1 (food assistance silent pilot, Sep 2009, state-wide Dec 09 - Jan 2010)
Phase 2 (energy assistance) May 2010
Phase 3 (Customer case management portal) September 2011
Phase 4 (Apply for all benefits and multi-lingual access) November 2011

B: Executive Summary Government - to - Citizen (Helping Hand portal)

Michigan's launched the Mi-Bridges self-service application <https://www.mibridges.michigan.gov/access/> as a mechanism for accepting online applications for food assistance. Our silent pilot launch happened in September with state-wide rollout beginning in December and January 2010. This phased approach was done in large measure to help reduce the face-to-face intake process and divert these applications from case workers to regional processing centers. Case worker involvement was limited to final authorization. Between 2009-2010 over 246,000 food assistance applications were processed in this fashion, saving approximately 196,800 hours of case worker intake. The primary business driver was high caseloads (600:1) and a state-wide hiring freeze. These data points convinced policy leaders that a substantial broadening of this online service would yield even more significant results. In 2011, Michigan expanded our self-service offering to include all income-based assistance programs: Cash, food, day care, medical, and energy assistance. Our self-service portal also added a new case management feature that allows subscribed users to make case file changes from an Internet enabled device and avoid a trip to a local office. These features include: Checking on benefit status, reporting case file changes, renewing benefits online as part of the re-determination process, uploading documents to the assigned worker, and a text messaging feature that allows caseworkers to send reminder notices to subscribed customers. Each of these features allows 90% of client case-worker interaction to be completed online without an office visit. This provides significant time savings to both parties. Our document upload and text messaging features is positioned to save mailing and correspondence costs. These features are also significant "barrier busters" for those clients who have limited transportation options.

Michigan is the first state to offer complete end-to-end online services that cover the assistance benefit life cycle. Just as significant is the public and private collaboration that has governed this project. To ensure no citizen is left behind because of limited Internet access, Michigan enlisted the help of our large network of private assistive partners. Over 700 private organizations offer assistance to citizens wishing to apply online. This presence is supplemented with a lobby management program whereby internet connected computers are available in DHS field offices for clients wishing to use the self-service model. This partnership piqued the interest of philanthropic organizations whose mission is helping citizens in need. This interest manifested itself into private donations that underwrote most of our project expansion costs in 2011. The Council of Michigan Foundations has project expansion and participates on our project governance committee.

Michigan's utility providers have an electronic interface into our system for the purpose of verifying a client's need for energy assistance. Utility payments in arrears are validated electronically and the application is automatically approved. Prior to this, case workers needed to contact utility companies and manually substantiate need.

Mi-Bridges is a national caliber example of marrying technology, process and innovative project partners to re-write how states administer assistance programs.

C. Description

Michigan was facing a significant problem with caseload projections for assistive services anticipated to grow beyond staffing levels capable of responding in a timely fashion. Our assistance caseload showed 350,000 citizen's seeking first time human services assistance in 2009. This problem was exasperated by structural budget deficits that prevented the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) from hiring new caseworkers – leading to an all-time caseload ratio approaching 600 active cases per DHS worker and jeopardizing our Federal standard of promptness for handling cases in a timely manner. DHS saw an opportunity to capitalize the use of technology by implementing an online application - MI Bridges – that presented citizens and community partners with a brand new avenue to access DHS programs and apply for assistance online / 24 hours a day / 7 days a week. Launched in August 2009, MI-Bridges soon became one of the most visited sites on the State of Michigan's website (200,000 average monthly visits in 2011-12) and provided citizens an opportunity to apply online at a time when the number of Food Stamp recipients in Michigan nearly doubled. This service was expanded in May 2010 to support online application for low income energy assistance (LIHEAP). Thru December 2011, over half a million food assistance and LIHEAP applications have been received online, representing 25% of all applications received. In the fall of 2011, these services were expanded to include application for all remaining programs, day care, cash and Medicaid. At the same time, MI Bridges launched our secure customer case management feature that allows clients to create an account and check their benefit status, make case file changes, and to use our document upload feature to electronically upload verification documents directly into our system when applying for benefits or reporting changes. We also offer online redetermination – meaning office visits can be avoided to verify on-going need for assistance.

Mi-Bridges was deemed the most practical and immediate solution for proving flexibility to customers while reducing time consuming case-worker and client interaction at over-crowded field offices. The underlying architecture of our core eligibility system – Bridges allowed for extension into on-line services. As part of the initiative, The Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget (DTMB) and our vendor partner, Deloitte Consulting, conducted a comprehensive current-state analysis of the current application, its middleware, and database, analyzed current and projected usage patterns to create a performance improvement plan for the new Mi-Bridges solution. Our design teams leveraged Oracle's data caching features to reduce disk access which further improved transaction timings. On the application side, tuning of SQLs and implementing more efficient methodologies for establishing database connections as well as switching to OLTP transactions allowed for a leaner application. Today, with online traffic exceeding 6,000 applications a day and over 10,000 hits received, the Bridges application and database utilization consistently hovers below 5%, which is considered exceptional performance. Enhancements such as these have positioned Mi-Bridges to take on larger volumes as part of any future initiatives that the department may consider.

All project deliverables were brought in on-time and on budget because of tightly managed project schedules overseen by our Bridges project management office, staffed with state employees from DTMB and DHS. Our Quality Assurance Office oversaw all

aspects of testing to ensure use-case scenarios were fully tested and passed. This significantly reduced defects prior to production launch and minimized code fixes during our first 90 days of product releases. All code deployment from test regions into production were controlled by weekly change control meetings that ensured no code changes would impact other functioning parts of our core Bridges application – a significant expectation of Executive management.

Adoption rates of all components of the system, apply for benefits and the case management features has exceeded expectations. 25% of all applications come from our online system. Over 215,000 users have created secure accounts. We've achieved this successful adoption through outreach and marketing campaigns developed jointly by state and private partners. Our strategy includes recruitment of over 700 community and faith based organizations, public service announcements and a project evaluation team dedicated to measuring outcomes and statistical measures to drive continuous improvement plans. The M-Bridges application is available in English, Spanish and Arabic to ensure accessibility.

Total project costs are \$11 million. Phase one and two (food and energy assistance) cost \$6 million. These costs leveraged favorable federal Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) administrative rates reducing state expenditures to under \$1 million.

The balance of the project leveraged \$5 million in private foundation dollars to keep state costs limited.

The state will absorb on-going operational costs within existing state staff resources. System enhancements and maintenance will be controlled by the State DTMB. This was assured with contract language that compelled Deloitte to include DTMB in all system design and development activities. A transition plan was developed and the state DTMB has taken over 100% operational support.

D. Significance

Michigan has improved government efficiency by continuing our expansion of self-service channels. Primary benefactors are citizens who have no experience navigating our network of social services or have limited transportation means for traveling to county offices, especially in rural areas with no public transportation. Secondary benefactors are state employees who are managing higher caseloads without staff augmentation. Channeling segments of our citizens to self-service provides a measure of relief from intake, inquiries and follow-up duties. Correspondence and mailing costs are reduced for both citizen and government with our electronic document upload capability. Finally, this project has helped raise the importance and necessity of cross-boundary collaboration. Michigan's partnership with Michigan United Way and other community organizations helped convince the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and other philanthropic partners to underwrite most of our expansion costs.

Michigan acknowledges that self-service channels are becoming more common place, but believe the breadth and scope of the Mi-Bridges application sets us apart as true

service delivery innovators. No other state offers the complete TANF experience in such an end-to-end online fashion. Michigan has engineered innovative features into the application not found in other solutions, including:

- Electronic interfaces with utility companies to verify client need and eliminate manual verification.
- Document scan and upload features to allow verification documents (identification, pay stubs etc.) to be sent electronically and appended to case files.
- Subscription based text messaging to send automatic alerts to clients about outstanding verification documents needed and re-determination dates.
- Content switch IP locator utility that allows our Office of the Inspector General to investigate applications being made from outside the United States and to alert intake workers on potential fraud and promote due-diligence in the application process.

The Mi-Bridges portal embraces multiple gubernatorial policy, strategic and priority goals. Policy and priority objectives of helping vulnerable citizens through economic hardship has intersected with strategic technology acquisition to offer an enhanced self-service channel to a new cohort of applicants not familiar with navigating the states network of assistance programs. Our efforts have been very successful since state-wide launch in December 2009 and the addition of new features in 2011. Measures of value to citizens include:

- 547,000 online applications for food assistance thru May 2012.
- 102,000 online applications for energy assistance thru May 2012.
- Since November 2011, expanded benefits include 50,000 Medicaid applications, 12,000 day care applications and 24,000 cash assistance applications.
- Users have created 215,000 new web accounts to check on the status of human services benefits and to report case file changes. 87,000 changes have been made to existing case files. This same solution was used to view over 322,000 correspondence documents that normally would have been mailed to the client.
- Over 31,000 verification documents have been uploaded and sent to DHS case workers since November 2011.
- Our toll-free IVR system has received 1.9 million calls from users checking on benefit status, pending verifications and appointments.
- Over 5,000 registered mobile phones have received 16,000 text messages.

Michigan IT and human services policy leaders have demonstrated that cross-boundary teams can quickly effect change, when sharing a common vision. The Mi-Bridges project addresses several key strategies and technology initiatives outlined by NASCIO members as priorities, including:

- Budget – Michigan's capture of metrics and economic impact data has been shared with private foundations and resulted in funding assistance for our self-service expansion.

- Cost control - self-help channels have reduced the urgency for caseworker hiring. Client web accounts reduce intervention with state staffs.
- Connectivity - using our network of non-profit service providers has bridged the digital divide by introducing hundreds of Internet connected facilities into our solution matrix, including state operated facilities.
- Shared services – Michigan is using a web service to exchange information with major utility companies allowing us to validate billing and payment information for client online applications for energy assistance.
- Mobility – The adoption of text based messaging acknowledges this new channel of choice. We are currently completing development of a HTML 5 mobile version of our case management portal. This will be launched in July 2012.

While the significance of this project is measured with enhanced services to citizens, the economic impact of this project is being felt within state government and in local communities as described below.

E. Benefits of the Project

Michigan is measuring both hard and soft savings on this project as part of Governor's report card and as a means for our private underwriters to calculate a ROI. This provides solid data points as we meet with the Legislature to secure funding support for similar citizen self-service models. Specific benefit measures include:

Citizen Benefit

- Transportation savings are being realized for each citizen transaction. Each application or case file change submitted electronically (750,000+ aggregate) saves an estimated \$2 per bus fare or \$5 gas and parking fees.
- Access points – over 700 registered community partners provide access points beyond DHS' 110 regional field offices. These registered community partners include faith based, community based, hospitals, K-12, higher education, and domestic violence shelters.
- Time savings – telephone queries. Prior to Mi-Bridges, clients routinely contacted case workers by phone to make standard queries on benefits status. This could result in telephone wait times exceeding 10 minutes. The Mi-Bridges interactive voice response (IVR) system now provides immediate answers to standard queries. Over 1.9 million calls have been placed since late 2009.
- Time savings – Case updates. The Report My Changes feature lets subscribed users make demographic changes online instead of via office visit. Over 215,000 web accounts have been created and 87,000 changes have been made. Each of these changes would have required a minimum 1 hour office visit for each client.
- Standard of promptness improvements. Walk-in clients for initial assistance would need to make an appointment and then return to complete the application process. Follow-up contacts with a caseworker need to be scheduled. Mi-Bridges offers 24 X 7 access and no need for an appointment. DHS reports that benefit issuance is 18% faster when completed electronically.
- Energy assistance applications can be approved one week sooner with the automatic verification process between Mi-Bridges and utility companies.

- Customer satisfaction – 90% of all clients surveyed said they preferred the online experience to the face-to-face channel.

Worker operational benefit

- DHS estimates that each online application received saves approximately 50 minutes for a caseworker. 649,000 applications have been received for food and energy. This equates into 32 million minutes (540,833 hours) of potential savings.
- 1.9 million calls have been received via our IVR system. Each call represents a potential phone call not made to a worker. Previously, 45 minutes per day was spent on average by case workers responding to client phone queries.
- Interfaces with utility companies saves workers 5-10 minutes previously needed to manually confirm a client need for energy assistance. 102,000 applications have been received representing 510,000 minutes in worker savings.
- DHS spends millions each year mailing information to over 1.2 million clients. The secure case management feature allows users to view documents online instead of receiving them in the mail. 322,000 documents have been shared with clients electronically. DHS anticipates it can save over \$1 million per year when our Federal waiver for electronic document correspondence is approved at the Federal level.
- The text messaging feature allows automatic notices and pending actions to be sent to clients. This relieves workers from sending out notices via U.S. mail.
- The electronic document upload feature supports 100% digital case files. Paper verification documents maintained in file folders is reduced.

Economic benefit

Michigan conducted research in 2009 to determine the value of food benefits not claimed in Michigan. That study used state data and federal eligibility rules to estimate possible unearned benefit in the food stamp program. This study concluded that 584,000 additional individuals were eligible but not receiving a benefit.

The federal food and nutrition services agency (FNS) has determined every \$5 dollars in food assistance returns 184% or \$9.20 in benefits. This higher return calculates the "rolling" economic impact that includes additional hiring by food stores, wage earnings etc. Michigan's average monthly food benefit to families is \$267 - resulting in an increased economic benefit of \$491 ($\$267 * 184\%$). For every additional 1,000 households served per month via Mi-Bridges, that would otherwise have foregone a face-to-face intake, Michigan is returned \$491,000.

Michigan's upfront investment of \$9 million is returning value to customers via time savings and reduced travel and office wait time. Worker morale and productivity has improved, and additional Federal dollars are returned to Michigan's groceries' and utility companies. This project has benefited multiple stakeholders and is built on an open platform that allows for transfer to other states. Currently, license agreements have been shared with Montana, New Mexico and Virginia Human Services offices. This project serves as a case study for using innovative technology solutions to improve the efficiency of Government.