

Build and Fund Staff Capacity in Your Government Agency to Integrate Benefits

The purpose of this resource guide is to outline one approach to integrating benefits that may be feasible in your state or county: building the in-house capacity to champion and supervise benefits integration.

An integrated benefits approach can include activities such as data-linking across multiple benefits programs and combining applications. Government agencies can begin and sustain efforts to integrate benefits by improving the skills of their current staff and hiring people who bring specific skills and experience.

Key skills to grow, recruit, and socialize include [Agile methodology](#) and [human-centered design](#). Government agencies can also create or assign staff roles that manage and coordinate integrated benefits efforts (which can include partnering closely with and overseeing the work of vendors) and enable collaborations across agencies and divisions.

In this document you'll find:

- + Core definitions and concepts for agile processes
- + Examples of how agencies can build capacity internally to successfully integrate
- + Examples of how agencies can build capacity internally to successfully integrate benefits programs, such as empowering employees to sustain new programs, using agile processes, and creating dedicated positions
- + Details on when and how to develop internal capabilities and prioritize targeted capacity building



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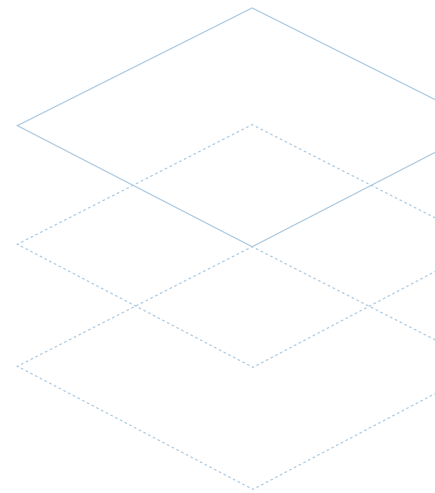


We are working towards a smooth transition and handoff to our IT departments, and creating a more agile, iterative improvement process as we go. We're continuing this great work, and [this integrated benefits partnership] is building our capacity in Minnesota to be able to do that ... [The American Rescue Plan] lets Minnesota bring resources to bear in supporting a digital services team to own after Code for America leaves, so we can continue this way of working and we can continue this level of improvement, at this robust speed, which we have never, ever been able to do in the past.

JOVON PERRY

Director of Economic Assistance and Employment Supports, Children and Family Services, Minnesota Department of Human Services.

From the Beeck Center event, "Integrated Benefits: Going Further With ARP" on August 4, 2021.



Empowering Government Employees to Sustain Long Term Change

When Minnesota's Department of Human Services partnered with [Code for America](#) to create an online, integrated benefits application, they intentionally designed the process to include government staff with Agile methodology experience.

There are various approaches to using agile principles, including [scrum](#) and [kanban](#) processes, but all are rooted in the ideas of the [Agile manifesto](#) for software development. Released in 2001, the manifesto's principles emphasize adaptability, collaboration, and the experience of software users. Work processes vary depending on the type of agile approach used, but include sprints (short periods of work focused on specific project components and goals), daily standups (short, regular meetings to ask questions and remove roadblocks to a project), and retrospectives (regular meetings for team members to reflect on and adjust working practices). For an extended glossary of agile terms and ideas, check out I8F's [guide](#) to agile principles.

In Minnesota, for instance, state IT staff used their experience with the state's legacy systems as they worked with [Code for America](#) engineers to build the updated, integrated application. Together, they adopted Agile processes such as daily standups, iteration planning meetings

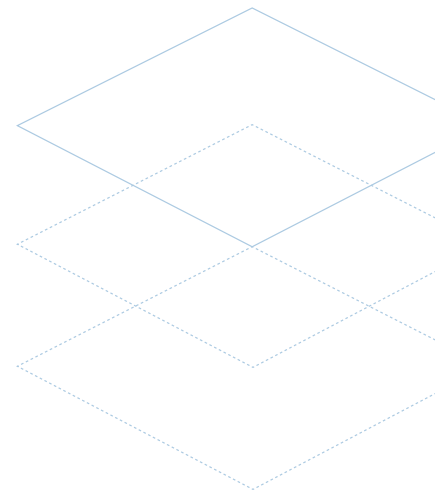
(team meetings to plan for upcoming portions of project work), and team retrospectives, and co-created a handoff plan that will allow state employees to sustain the application long term.

Building Government’s Agile and Human-Centered Design Capacity

In Vermont, the process of piloting and deploying a secure, online document uploader for SNAP verification, which was expanded to 37 benefit programs, led to a radically different way of approaching change at the state agency.

“Our focus working with [Nava PBC](#) has been to build up our own user-centered design capacity, our [Agile] process, and successful adoption of these technologies,” says Cassandra Madison, former deputy commissioner of the Vermont Department of Health Access.

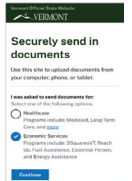
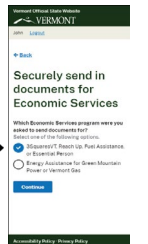
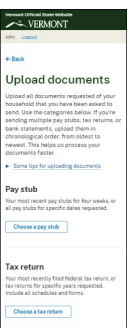
Nava PBC’s collaboration with the State of Vermont highlighted two other practices that build government staff capacity to improve benefit delivery and integrate benefit programs. The first is identifying who can internally champion pilots and changes to benefit delivery such as the supervisor at the Economic Service Division Office who supported the document uploader pilot. Staff in these roles can promote and socialize human-centered design and Agile methodology among their colleagues in government. The second is to designate a [product owner](#) among government staff to coordinate and ultimately be responsible for the change process.



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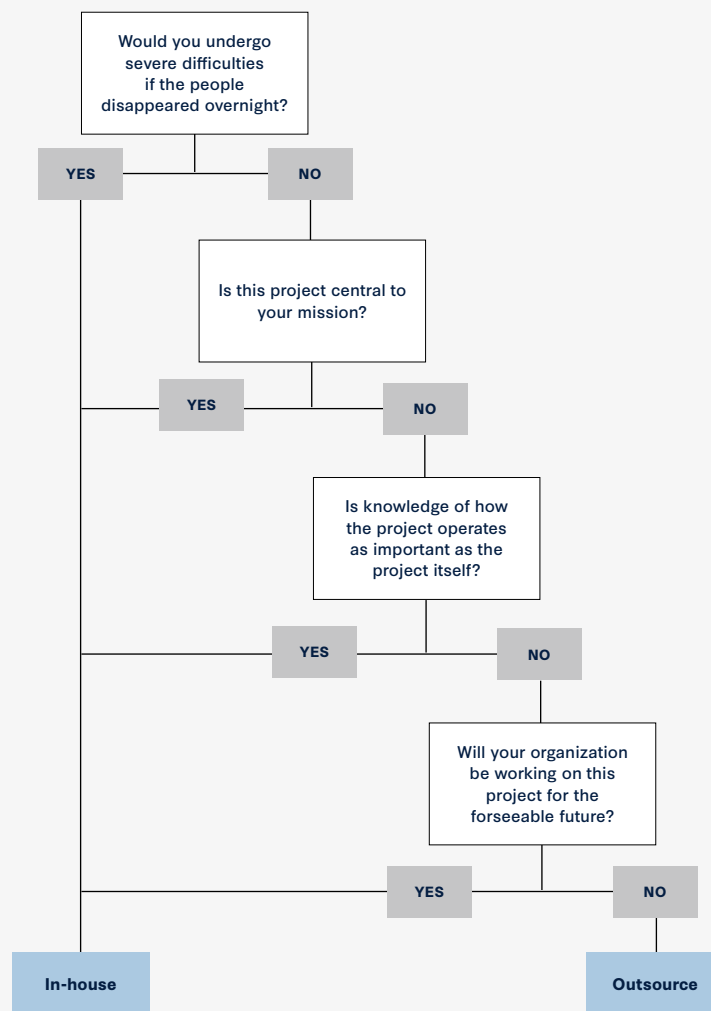
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Instructions for using the Vermont Department for Children and Families’ document uploader, posted on the Vermont Department for Children and Families [website](#).

Funding Dedicated In-House Positions

There can be challenges when recruiting into public sector roles including wage gaps and potentially complex job posting and hiring processes. That said, determining when to create and hire a new in-house position can help government agencies meet their goals and serve residents. As outlined by digital service leader and researcher Mark Lerner, there are several questions agencies might ask to decide whether it makes sense to hire internally to complete a project or meet a goal. These questions include:

- + Would you undergo severe difficulties if the people involved in this project disappeared overnight?
- + Is this project central to your mission?
- + Is knowledge of how the project operates as important as the project itself?
- + Will your organization be working on this project for the foreseeable future?



Flowchart for deciding whether a role should be in-house or outsourced from Mark Lerner's Belfer Center blog post, [Should This Role Be In-House or Outsourced?](#)

In general, determining priority areas for public sector recruitment is important to improving service delivery and government modernization. (For a deeper discussion, see Mark Lerner’s [policy brief](#) on hiring in-house technical talent.) In the public benefits space, creating dedicated in-house positions is one approach to integrating benefits and improving application and enrollment experiences across services.

One state’s experience is a good example of this. In 2020, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services created the new role of cross enrollment coordinator. The position is charged with finding ways to connect clients enrolled in one or more benefit programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) with other benefits that have similar eligibility standards. Michigan’s benefit program directors are excited to collaborate on cross enrollment because of the efficiencies that it creates, and having a dedicated coordinator enables staff-wide exploration and implementation. (For more on benefits cross enrollment, check out “[Conducting Outreach for Benefits Cross Enrollment](#).”)



i Find Out More on the Digital Benefits Hub

Read more about capacity building in Minnesota and Vermont:

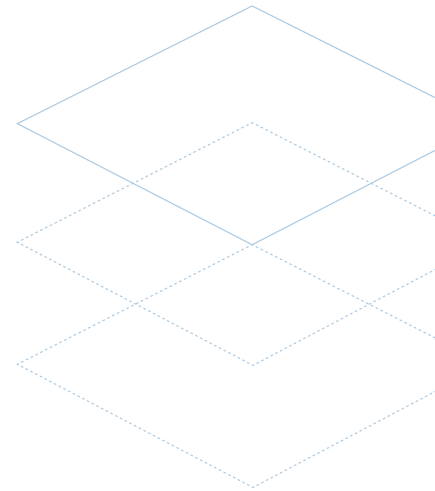
- + [Four Lessons from Our Journey to Deliver Human-Centered Integrated Benefits.](#)
- + [Integrating Eligibility and Enrollment, One Piece of Software at a Time.](#)
- + [Power to the Public: The Promise of Public Interest Technology. Chapter 2: Design, Data, and Delivery.](#)

Read more about hiring in-house talent:

- + [De-Risking Guide: State Software Budgeting > Budgeting and Overseeing Tech Projects > Hire In-House](#)
- + [Should This Role Be In-House, or Outsourced?](#)
- + [The Government Technology Silver Bullet: Hiring In-House Technical Talent](#)

Find Civilla’s online courses to develop human-centered design capacity at your organization:

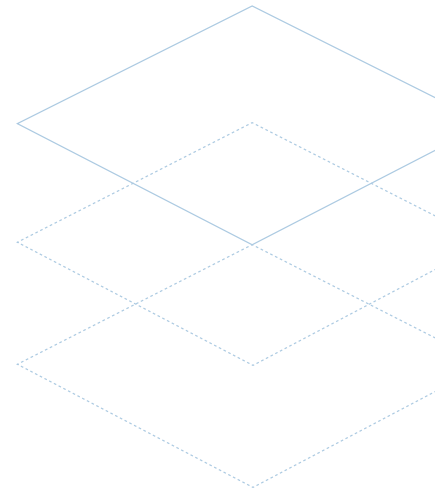
- + [\[Online Courses\] Practica: Human-Centered Research and Design: Guidance on Redesigning Applications, Renewals, and Correspondence.](#)



About this resource:

This resource is part of a larger initiative by the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University to document innovations in social safety net benefits delivery that are driven by human-centered service design, data-informed practices, and responsive technology. It also has the goal of spreading proven practices more widely. This resource was adapted from the report “Integrating Social Safety Net Benefits: Options for State and County Agencies Informed by Recent Integration Successes,” written by Sara Soka for the Beeck Center for Social Impact and Innovation in January 2022.

Much of the content in this resource is derived from a 2021 workshop featuring government employees who were instrumental in their state’s integrated benefits efforts. The workshop, which was part of a series on the historic funding opportunities in the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), showcased different approaches to invest in infrastructure, human capital, and projects that integrate benefit applications, outreach, renewal, and service delivery.



Get in Touch

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