GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY | beeckcenter social impact + innovation

Implementing Benefits Eligibility + Enrollment Systems:

A Review of State Practices

How do state benefits administering agencies build and maintain integrated eligibility and enrollment systems?


ARIEL KENNAN


ELIZABETH BYNUM SORRELL


RACHEL MEADE SMITH


JASON GOODMAN

A Guide for State Administrators, Legislators, Advocates + Delivery Partners

The Implementing Benefits Eligibility + Enrollment Systems research project, led by the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University, documents states' current approaches and future aspirations for the technologies and processes used to build and maintain integrated eligibility and enrollment (IEE) systems for core benefits programs.

Many U.S. states and territories operate IEE systems, which allow people to apply for multiple public benefits programs (i.e. the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and child care) through one process rather than having to apply through separate processes for each program. However, there has been limited research documenting the management, staffing, stakeholder engagement, and technology used within these systems.

Between mid-July and mid-September 2025, we spoke to twenty four government employees from seven states which operate or are building IEEs. This research resulted in a series of publications:

- → **Key Context**
  Explains the fundamentals of state IEE system—including the technology, opportunities, risks, and stakeholders involved.
- → **Insights on State Approaches and Processes**
  Explains current state IEE system implementation processes, approaches, and opportunities for future processes and technologies.
- → **State Responses to H.R. 1**
  Shares an early look at how states are responding to 2025 policy changes from federal agencies and Congress, including those enacted under H.R. 1.

What is an IEE System?

Scan QR code or click here to access the full research series.

IEEs allow people to apply for multiple public benefits programs using one process.

While all IEE systems share the goal of streamlining applications, what they look like depends on many factors, including funding, project team composition, legacy technologies, vendor contracts, and state policies. IEE systems offer some type of integrated benefits experience, in contrast to fully standalone applications that have distinct systems for acquiring and processing applicant information.

One application, *many* backend systems

In some states, integration occurs primarily on the front-end, where a unified application (online portal or paper application) allows clients to apply for multiple benefit programs simultaneously through a single interface. The information provided by applicants is then routed to multiple program-specific backend systems for processing, which may be owned and managed by different state agencies.

One application, *one* backend system

Other states have adopted a more comprehensive integration model, where a unified front-end application connects to a single integrated backend system that handles eligibility determination across multiple programs. This architecture consolidates both the public-facing experience and the underlying administrative infrastructure, creating a more deeply integrated benefits delivery system.

Read more about the technology and stakeholders involved in IEE systems.

Value + Risks in IEE Systems

Value of IEE Systems

IEE systems are understood to offer improvements in terms of efficiency and access, including:

1. Seamless delivery of multiple benefits
2. Streamlined caseworker experience
3. Improved client experience

Risks in IEE Systems

While creating efficiency and access, IEE systems also introduce risks inherent to digital systems including:

1. Automated decision-making that harms clients
2. Translation errors and interpretations
3. Lack of transparency in existing systems
4. Data consolidation that can expose personal information or enable misuse

Read more about Values + Risks of IEE systems.

"We really wanted to have our clients … stop [having to] repeat themselves over and over as they navigated through different programs in the department, [and] have one front door they could go to as … there are so many different pathways to connect to our programs. … None of our programs are talking to each other at the same time. … It really goes back to expanding access for our clients—providing faster, [higher] quality benefits or services—and then improving the overall client experience."

— State Leader

IEE Product Management: State Approaches

The process of updating and maintaining IEE systems varies across state agencies, depending on the number of distinct agencies involved, the governance structures used, and the approach to project management and development.

Cadence

IEE systems are complex and ever-evolving—states reported varying cadences for managing, prioritizing, and addressing those changes, including making changes:

- Frequently and consistently every six weeks
- Quarterly or as-needed to emerging needs
- Dependent on strategic roadmaps; often over multiple years

Frameworks

States discussed two primary product management paradigms: agile and waterfall as ways to structure workflows. However, they rarely described using only one product management paradigm to structure workflows, or rigid interpretations of either.

- **Agile** refers to an iterative approach in which a small team continuously releases product updates based on ongoing feedback.
- **Waterfall** is a more traditional approach, in which each phase of a project is completed in full before the next begins. This approach is often considered more rigid, with fewer opportunities for feedback and revision.

> "[We have] to ensure that we're not introducing an unintended outcome as a result of a change that we may think is simple. That simple, simple change may have lasting impacts for families."
>
> — State Leader

Common Steps in Updating IEE Systems

- Prepare for Updates
- Assess Policy
- Analyze System Impact
- Prioritize Changes
- Plan and Design Updates
- Test and Iterate Updates
- Make Final Changes and Approvals
- Train Staff
- Communicate Updates to Clients and Organizations

Read more about Common Steps in IEE system updates.

Pain Points

States face challenges related to technology, personnel, and processes used for managing IEE systems. Our Insights on State Approaches and Processes publication covers these in more detail.

Technology Pain Points

1. Many states are working with IEE systems that have grown incrementally over many years, accumulating significant "technical debt" and complex interdependencies.
2. Systems rely on human data entry, risking errors and reducing efficiency.
3. Integrated front-end web applications mask incomplete backend system integration.
4. The absence of proper development environments and test data make it difficult to simulate complex policy changes and assess their potential impacts.
5. Systems have varying levels of technical documentation that require continual maintenance.

Personnel Pain Points

1. States are working with a consistent deficit of resources.
2. Employee turnover presents significant risks.

Process Pain Points

1. Legislative cycles and technical processes are often misaligned, with the former having a significant impact on system operations and updates.
2. Congress and federal agencies tend to craft policies and guidance for programs in silos, which can make integration challenging.
3. Coordinating across agencies requires negotiating occasionally divergent priorities and requirements, and involves agency coordination at the leadership and frontline level.
4. Extensive procurement requirements and small vendor pools present challenges in procuring technology vendors.

"I think, for the most part, folks work really hard to implement … changes and implement them accurately, but because of the complexity of it, there are still cases where some of the situations either are missed, or it has impacts that turn out in ways that were not [what] the policy teams intended, because the computer worked in a way that was a bit obtuse and not transparent."

— State Leader

Recommendations

Based on our conversations with states, we offer the following recommendations to meet states at different points in their integration journey—ranging from items more easily within agency control of their IEE systems to the upstream policies, funding, and processes that inform them.

Legislation

- Design legislation that considers benefits programs collectively rather than in isolation to reduce differing—and at times conflicting—eligibility criteria definitions and requirements.
- Support funding models that decrease administrative burden for states that must "braid and blend" federal funding to modernize their systems.
- Engage with the state IEE team to synchronize the effective dates of legislation with feasible development cycles and implementation roadmaps.

Stakeholder Engagement

- Adopt a governance model that enables collaboration and transparency between partner agencies.
- Create shared resources (e.g., reports, informational sessions) for executive leaders and legislators to understand the state's IEE system, and the processes involved in maintaining and updating these systems.

Stakeholder Engagement

- Build in-house technical and product management capacity to ensure internal leadership of IEE system processes and development.
- Establish a product management paradigm responsive to policy changes, user needs, and technical inefficiencies.

Technology

- Keep code and technical documentation up-to-date and in a shared repository, enabling technologists, policy, and business teams to understand the system and maintain institutional knowledge.
- Break the system architecture into modular components that allow for independent control and the development of specific features.
- Build rules engines independent of core application and case management functionalities, ideally with a common rules structure across systems (e.g., a Rules as Code approach), and provide support for traceability in eligibility calculations.
- Invest in development environments, and test data and automation prior to deployment to make it easier to test changes.

Procurement

- Use modular system architecture to break procurements into smaller scopes and potentially attract a more diverse vendor pool.
- Use Request for Information (RFI) processes to share strategies, analyze the vendor landscape, and answer key questions before designing Requests for Proposal (RFPs) and detailed requirements (see Louisiana and Minnesota examples).

Alternative Approaches

States are looking towards a future in which alternative processes and improved technology make IEE systems easier to build and maintain.

Goals for Alternative Processes

1. Less dependence on vendors and more in-house capacity.
2. New governance models to prioritize IEE projects.

Goals for Alternative Technology

1. Improved client experience through more efficient and human-centered technology, including mobile-first applications, integrated data, and client correspondence.
2. Rules engines that are easier for cross-disciplinary teams to update and understand.
3. Rules engine eligibility calculations that are easier for caseworkers to understand and engage with.
4. Modular systems with easy-to-replace components.
5. AI-based alternatives that support people and processes.

Thank you to the state leaders who spoke with us about their IEE systems.

> "We have to have the expectation that we are not outsourcing everything to a vendor....We have to staff ourselves differently in order to support this sort of model."
>
> — State Leader

Next Steps

Read Report Series
Read the full report series on the Digital Government Hub.

Rules as Code Resources
Explore Rules as Code and Digitizing Policy resources.

Contact Team
Contact the Beeck Center's Rules as Code team at rulesascode@georgetown.edu

Join Community
Join the Rules as Code Interest Area hosted by the Digital Government Network.