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2011 Innovations Awards Application

DEADLINE: MARCH 28, 2011

ID # (assigned by CSG): 2011- _____

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: Michigan

Assign Program Category: Health and Human Services, Human Services

1. Program Name: Michigan online Bridges program
2. Administering Agency: Department of Human Services
3. Contact Person: Jim Hogan, Information Officer
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8. Web site Address: <https://www.mibridges.michigan.gov/access>
9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

The Michigan online Bridges program accepts internet based applications for food assistance and energy assistance. The service includes a self-registered secured web-based account and / or IVR for account maintenance.

10. How long has this program been operational:

The online system went live in August 2009.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

Background: In 2009, Michigan's unemployment rate peaked at 15.3% - highest in the nation. As individuals ran out of unemployment benefits, there was the parallel climb in first time filers for other supportive services: cash, medical, food, energy and day care. As of March 2011, over 1/5 of Michigan's population is receiving some type of government assistance. The MI-Bridges **program was created** to meet the needs of a new cohort of first-time applicants for food and energy assistance. This solution **addresses two significant problems:** access and caseload management. Our 24X7 Internet solution accepts applications for food and energy assistance. This access channel has proved to be very popular. In the 17 months of operation, over 300,000 applications for food assistance and 10,000 applications for energy assistance has been received. Families without Internet access or needing assistance to answer eligibility questions can visit over 500 registered community partners (United Way, faith-based organizations) to apply online. The Internet access channel also provides a measure of relief for our caseworkers. Online applications are processed at three intake centers and routed to eligibility workers for final approval. This reduces the need for the time-consuming face-to-face intake process. Likewise, our web and IVR based modules allow applicants to check on the status of their submission and accepts changes to family demographic information. This has reduced caseworker time spent on the phone with clients answering routine questions. Current caseload ratios have risen from 200:1 (2002) to 700:1 (2011). Time reductions and efficiencies in MI-Bridges allow workers

to assume additional caseloads - significant given our inability to hire new workers with continuing declines in state revenues.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

- March 2009, Wisconsin Access system transferred to Michigan. This served as our initial code base.
- April 2009, contract approval to have Deloitte consulting assist State of Michigan technology staffs in developing online interface to our Bridges eligibility system.
- August 2009, production release of Mi-Bridges to begin accepting food assistance benefits applications online.
- August 2009, production release of interactive voice recognition (IVR) solution to query back-end database to provide automated responses for customer query on benefit status.
- September 2009, Registration and training for community partners begins.
- September 2009, media campaign and public service announcements to raise awareness and expand outreach.
- December 2009 - agreement reached with major utility providers to provide two-way interface to automatically verify client energy payments.
- May 2010 – Online application for energy assistance launched.
- October 2010 – \$5 million in private foundation funding secured to expand Mi-Bridges to include all assistance payments (cash, health care and day care).
- January 2011 – contract approval to have Deloitte consulting assist state technology staffs in completing online applications for cash, medical and day care and IVR expansion.
- July 2011 – Projected launch of IVR / web capability to determine filing status for all state assistance programs.
- November 2011 – Projected launch date for online applications for cash, health care and day care. Includes document upload capability.
- February 2012 – Projected launch date for online redetermination for benefits.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

The Mi-Bridges is creative in three aspects:

- a. Transferability. The Michigan solution uses the self-service code base installed for Wisconsin's online application for food assistance. Building on that code base, Michigan has configured a solution that can be transferred to other states as well.
- b. Originality – Michigan is one of a few states that provides self-service for food assistance. We are the first state to offer online application for energy assistance. This includes the innovative use of web services to electronically transfer client information to utility companies to verify that a client has an outstanding energy payment due. This interface reduces the manual verification process that would have to be done by an assistance worker. Our web and IVR services are also industry setting examples of how self-service channels can be used to reduce caseworker time responding to high volume queries so they can better focus on client outcomes.
- c. Collaboration – Michigan has developed a network of over 500 community partners to assist clients in determining potential eligibility and helping them apply for benefits. Our online solution includes reporting metrics that allow us to identify the effectiveness of these channels, as measured by applications processed. Our partnership with utility companies is also unique. The two-way interface to verify information saves time for both state staffs and utility company billing staffs. Finally, our demonstrated partnership with a large network of private assistive agencies has piqued the interest of several philanthropic organizations that pooled foundation dollars to allow Michigan to extend our online solution to all human services assistance programs.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

Total costs: \$7 million.

- Contract costs for Deloitte consulting: \$4.1 million,
- Server, software, hosting, IVR infrastructure, SOM staffing costs: 4 dedicated programmers: \$2.9 million.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

- DHS costs for operating three centralized intake centers for all applications and subsequent routing to caseworkers includes \$4 million and 50 staff from DHS.
- Technology support staffs from Department of Technology, Management and Budget. 1 dedicated FTE (\$85,000)
- Server hosting costs: \$224,000 –base hosting charge to the Department of Human Services
- Data storage costs: \$244,000 based on online applications received.
- IVR support – \$113,053

16. How is the program funded?

Food assistance: 20% State general fund, 20% SNAP ARRA, 60% federal SNAP.

Energy assistance: 100% federal LIEAP

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

- Infrastructure: Dell servers for the IVR platform, virtual servers for the web and application platform and Sun servers for the database platform
- Software: Java / Java Enterprise Edition / Oracle 11G database, Genesys Voice Platform / Nuance RealSpeak

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Food assistance originated in Wisconsin. Energy assistance and interface with utility companies is unique to Michigan.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

Wisconsin offers online food assistance. Michigan is unique with our collaboration with 500+ assistive agencies and our collaboration with utility companies for energy payment verification. Michigan is also unique in that subsequent enhancements will be fully funded with private foundation funding (\$5 million).

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

No. Michigan has secured a private foundation grant for \$5 million to expand our current system. Significant innovative enhancements will be deployed as follows:

- July 2011 – Both our Internet and IVR based “check my benefits” solution will be expanded to allow clients to query status information on cash assistance, health care and day care
- November 2011 – The web-based apply for benefits application will include cash, health care and day care.

- November 2011 – Document upload capability will allow clients to electronically submit verification information with their online submission. This will reduce the need for mailing or dropping off verification data to local offices, saving both client and caseworker time.
- February 2012 – Renew my benefits. Existing benefit recipients will be able to complete semi and annual redeterminations using the Mi-Bridges application. This will provide relief to both caseworkers and recipients by eliminating the need for face-to-face redetermination.
- February 2012 – Mi-Bridges will be available in Arabic. The application is currently offered in English and Spanish.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

PRO's: This solution has significantly increased the Internet as an alternative filing channel.

- Since the public launch in August 2009, over 350,000 applications for food assistance have been taken on the Internet. Currently, 25% of all food assistance applications come via Internet.
- 10,000 applications for energy assistance have been received since May 2010.

PRO's: This solution has allowed DHS caseworkers to keep up with rising caseload ratios (700:1) by providing alternative channels for citizens to check on benefit status or report changes.

- Over 191,000 web accounts created for citizens to check on benefit status and to report changes.
- 33,000 demographic changes processed via this service.
- 896,000 calls processed via IVR.
- Electronic verification for energy assistance eliminates all manual verification from DHS caseworker and utility company billing clerks.

PRO's: Community engagement. This solution has been embraced by our large network of private assistive agencies.

- 536 community partners have registered to assist citizens in completing applications.
- This engagement has caught the attention of national philanthropic organizations who have pledged support to help expand our service offerings.

PRO's: Extensible technology solution uses a flexible, open J2EE based architecture:

- Presentation Tier based on open standards (JSP, JavaScript, and XML)
- Separation of business logic from presentation tier simplifies development and maintenance
- Web Services are loosely coupled and extensible
- Framework tools allow the rapid development and deployment of new screens and functionality

CON's:

Demand outstripped resources

- The initial launch in August 2009 far exceeded our estimates of how many applications we'd receive via the Internet. Our claims processing centers were understaffed to handle the initial volume. It took several weeks and the addition of staffs to process all electronic submissions and route to assistance caseworkers.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

The program has received significant national attention and Michigan has shared our experiences with several states. The program's popularity is measured in the % of filings taking place on the Internet vs. traditional intake (25% Internet). The program will change with the addition of cash, medical and day care in the next year. The redetermination component (February 2012) will significantly alter traditional thinking on the administration of benefits. Electronic processing in lieu of face-to-face intake will continue to grow and provide a mechanism for worker relief. Finally, the infrastructure in place to accept online submission for health care will be a significant

technology enabler as Michigan begins to contemplate a state-wide health care exchange as part of the health care reform act.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Demand may exceed expectations. Concerns over the “digital divide” may surface. This is mitigated with a strong community partnership.

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Program Categories and Subcategories**

Use these as guidelines to determine the appropriate Program Category for your state's submission and list that program category on page one of this application. Choose only one.

Infrastructure and Economic Development

- Business/Commerce
- Economic Development
- Transportation

Government Operations and Technology

- Administration
- Elections
- Information Systems
- Public Information
- Revenue
- Telecommunications

Health & Human Services

- Aging
- Children & Families
- Health Services
- Housing
- Human Services

Human Resources/Education

- Education
- Labor
- Management
- Personnel
- Training and Development
- Workforce Development

Natural Resources

- Agriculture
- Energy
- Environment
- Environmental Protection
- Natural Resources
- Parks & Recreation
- Water Resources

Public Safety/Corrections

- Corrections
- Courts
- Criminal Justice
- Drugs
- Emergency Management
- Public Safety

Save in .doc or rtf. Return completed application electronically to innovations@csg.org or mail to:

CSG Innovations Awards 2011
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This application is also available at www.csg.org.