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# Work Support Strategies: Early Lessons

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and Statistics (NAWRS) Workshop

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Lindsay Giesen and Julia Isaacs

# WSS NATIONAL TEAM

## FUNDERS



THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT & EVALUATION



## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



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# Presentation Overview

1. A Brief Summary of WSS
  2. **WHY** did states commit to WSS?
  - 3.
  - 4.
  5. **WHAT** did states do in the first (planning) year?
  6. **HOW** did states do it?
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# SUMMARY: WHAT IS WSS?



Improve families' well-being by increasing enrollment in the full package of work supports.

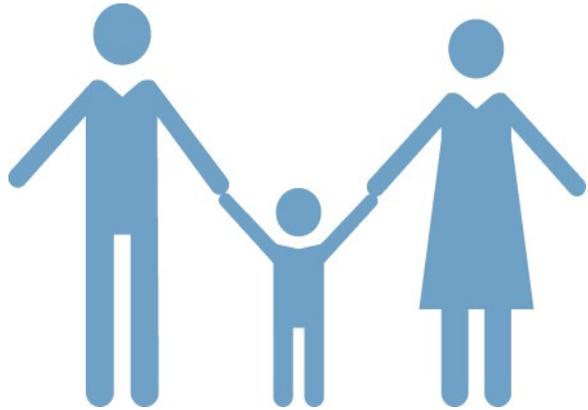


Help states deliver benefits more effectively and efficiently



Share lessons learned to inform state and federal policies.

# The Challenge WSS Addresses:



Work supports can help low-income families: meet needs, improve outcomes, and stabilize work.

Health reform makes the opportunities greater as states prepare to add millions more adults.

Yet many families do not receive the full package of benefits.

State policy, processes, systems are part of the barrier

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# WSS AIMS TO INTEGRATE AND MODERNIZE DELIVERY OF.....

- Medicaid/ CHIP
  - SNAP (nutrition assistance)
  - Child Care Development Fund (child care subsidies)
  - Others identified by the states (such as TANF and energy assistance)
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# TWO PHASE DESIGN

## PHASE 1: PLANNING AND PILOTING

- One year (2011-2012)
- Nine states
- \$250,000 each
- Leveraged resources
- Extensive technical assistance, peer-to-peer
- Data-driven assessment
- Culminated in state action plan

## PHASE 2:

- IMPLEMENTATION (2013-2015)
- \$1-\$1.5 million each
- Leveraged resources
- Extensive technical assistance, peer-to-peer
- Implementation, Outcome Tracking and Impact Evaluation
- Information sharing with federal officials & others

# THE STATES

Colorado

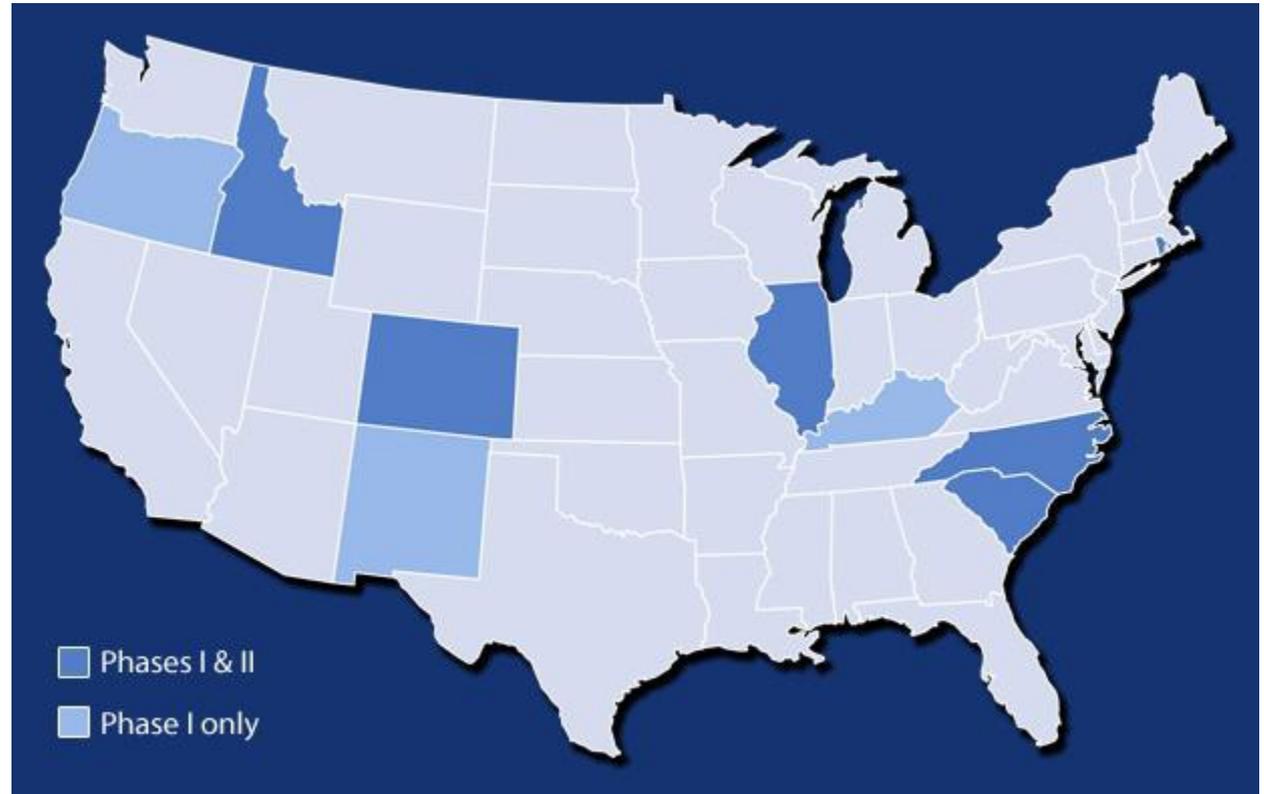
Idaho

Illinois

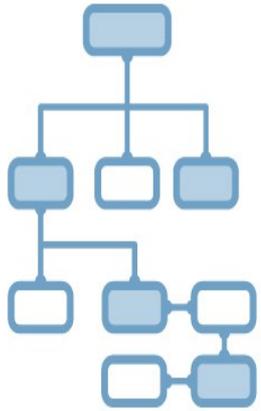
North Carolina

South Carolina

Rhode Island



# STATE ACTIVITIES



Business  
processes



Policy



Technology &  
information  
systems



Data analysis  
and use



Management &  
Communication

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# What's the Status of WSS today?

- Halfway through four years of work with the states.
    - Planning year complete (9 states).
    - One year into three year implementation phase (6 states)
  - Evaluation reports describe lessons from first (planning) year.
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# WHY DID STATES COMMIT TO WSS?

## Because...

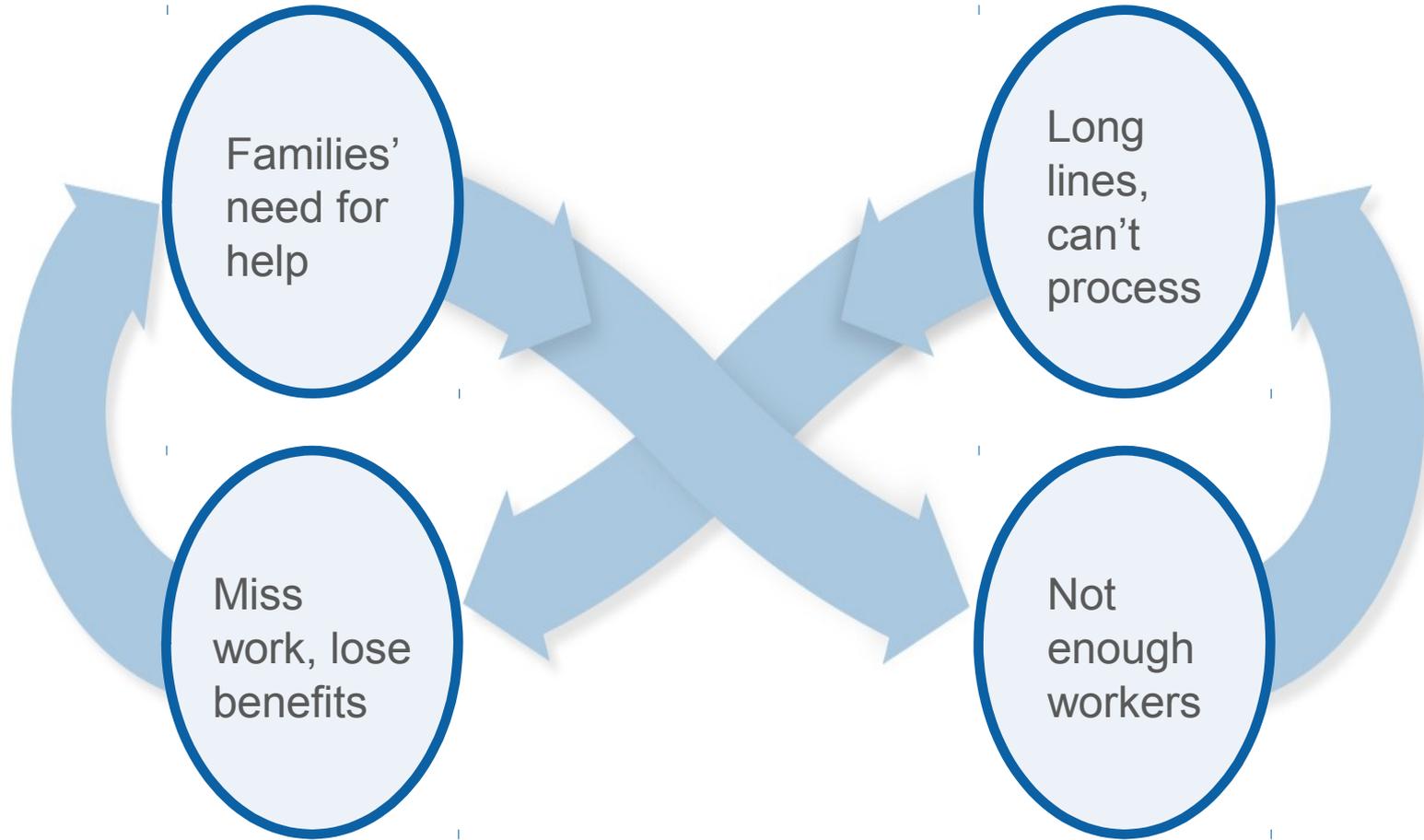
- Pre-Reform Systems Weren't Working
- Responsive Government Is A Widely Shared Value
- Fragmented Approaches Frustrate Counties
- Improvements Benefit Children and Families

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# Because Pre-Reform Systems Weren't Working

- “My first week in office was what got my attention. USDA delivered a letter that said we owed them...for abysmal performance under SNAP....Idaho was 51st in the nation.” – Director Richard Armstrong, IDHW
  
  - “We saw increased absenteeism, unscheduled absences, and huge usage of furlough days. [Staff] were on burnout....” – Illinois local office administrator
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# FAMILIES AND WORKERS: CAUGHT IN A CYCLE



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# Because Responsive Government Is A Widely Shared Value

- State elected officials of both parties
    - Hear from constituents about problems
    - Want to modernize service delivery, reduce complaints, end antiquated bureaucracy.
    - Want to reduce duplication and improve efficiency.
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# Because Fragmented Approaches Frustrate Counties

- [In the past] the state's role was to throw policies out and then audit us to death." – Colorado county social services director
  - [In the past] different [state] programs were not really coming together to discuss changes.... [C]hanges were in silos and would only be made for specific programs." -- NC county representative
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# Because Improvements Benefit Children and Families

- Getting families the whole work supports package will help them move up on the job.
  - Keeping children on health insurance without gaps will improve outcomes.
  - Understanding families' needs all at once will solve their problems more quickly.
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**The Role of Vision**  
of what we want our processes to look like two years out or three years out....that's why this project will stand the test of time." -- NC WSS team member

[After this planning year] **we look at things completely differently. We're not facilitating a benefit, we're enhancing a work support, and we are confident in talking about it that way.**" – ID WSS team member

- **Why Vision Matters**
    - Maintains commitment
    - Clarifies direction in the face of uncertainty
    - Sets priorities
    - Communicates crisply
    - Knits together activities that might otherwise feel unrelated
    - Undercuts complacency
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**What did states do in  
wss year 1?**

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# Early Wins: In the first year alone,

- Colorado condensed its 26-page joint benefit application to 8 pages. (UPDATE to the following year: Reports improved timeliness in county offices, new data tracking.)
  - South Carolina retained tens of thousands of children on Medicaid through express lane redeterminations. (UPDATE to the following year: Expanded express lane to applications.)
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# Early Wins: In the first year alone...

- North Carolina piloted aligned certification in two counties. (UPDATE: Built on first-year innovations through peer-to-peer reviews; integrated eligibility system roll-out.)
  - Idaho reduced churn by aligning certification and pre-filling redetermination forms. (UPDATE: Progress on telephonic signature, lobby management to match workers with demand, automated verification.)
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# Early Wins: In the first year alone,

- Illinois piloted new processes in 3 large offices, speeding up response to clients. (UPDATE: Leadership training on embracing ACA and new IES as drivers of change; peer-to-peer reviews on service delivery.)
- Rhode Island tested and implemented same-day service to SNAP clients in Providence, its largest office. (UPDATE: Committed to integrated strategy under ACA.)

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# What States Did in the First Year:

- ## 7 Common Themes
1. Seized health reform as an opportunity for integration.
  2. Elevated child care policy and practice.
  3. Improved local office processes to speed decision-making.
  4. Built new approaches to policy -- for example, to reduce churn and use data across programs.
  5. Improved communication between state agencies and state and local/county offices.
  6. Built capacity to collect and analyze data, and use that data to make informed decisions.
  7. Developed individualized action plans.
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Building Capacity for Reform: The Challenges States Faced and  
the Approaches They Developed

**How did states Do It?**

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# Challenge #1: Data for Decision-Making

- “We had data but couldn’t get to it....the [data] warehouse wasn’t able to answer the questions we presented.”
- “There is just no culture [of using data] ....The issues that rise up are handled and those that don’t [are not].”

## The Problem

## The Strategies

- Moving ahead with existing data.
- Building staff capacity to use data.
- Investing in better data.

# Challenge #2: Modernizing Technology

## The Problem

- “If you just apply technology to bad processes, you just have a faster way of doing inefficient things.” – North Carolina WSS team member

## The Strategies

- Use technology to support the vision, not create the vision.
- Align technology change with changes in business process, policy, culture.
- Develop institutions and governance structures (committees, oversight) to enforce that alignment.

# Challenge #3: Collaboration

- **The Problem** “We were making the process hard, writing policies separately [for each program].”
- “The biggest challenge is ... overcoming the turf-ism....The mere fact that they are separate entities is a challenge, but also the whole history issue.”

## **The Strategies**

- There are no quick fixes!
- Multi-pronged strategies
- Clear vision & roles
- Changed behavior
- New relationships
- New institutions
- Early wins achieved together

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# Challenge #4: Child Care - Untapped Potential

## The problem....

- “If it’s confusing and complex to you as an agency...how do you think your clients understand it?”
- “[In child care] we do control our destiny. The [federal] rules are minimal.”

## Early actions....

- Simplify eligibility and verification (ID, RI)
  - Align with SNAP (ID)
  - Assess business processes (IL)
  - More to come
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# Challenge #5: Leadership and Management Capacity

## The Problem

- “The structure – having regular meetings, following up....hasn’t happened before.”
- “The hardest angle is on the ground. The management and leadership at the local level have to ...do the change.”

- Strong leadership and management at many levels.

## The Strategies

- Each person needs to play their position well.
- Project management capacity frees more leaders to contribute.
- Turnover means it’s never done.

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# Lessons Learned

- A vision matters
  - Quick wins can be powerful
  - There is value in connecting with state peers
  - Changes to policy, business process, or IT are less effective when made in a vacuum.
  - Make local and state staff partners of change
  - Make data useful and accessible to the decision makers
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# Sources and more information

- <http://www.urban.org/worksupport/>
- Early Lessons from the WSS Initiative
  - Cross-cutting report: <http://www.urban.org/publications/412789.html>
  - Nine state reports: <http://www.urban.org/worksupport/Early-Lessons.cfm>
  - Commentary Collection  
<http://www.urban.org/publications/412833.html>

Questions? Contact [jisaacs@urban.org](mailto:jisaacs@urban.org)

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