Colorado Child Support Services

Digital Marketing Project
Intervention 2:
Facebook Advertising

CPR
center *for* policy research

Evaluation Report
Anne Byrne, MS
July 2020

Colorado Department of Human Services
7 mins · 🌐

Do you need help getting child support? By opening a case with the Colorado Child Support Services Program, you can access many services to support your family.

Locate a parent 📍
Collect child support 💲
Change an order ✏️

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We can help you.   [Learn More]

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Do you need help getting child support? The Colorado Child Support Services Program can start an order and/or collect child support for a one-time application fee of $20.

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Find out your options.   [Apply Now]

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COVER PAGE

INTERVENTION I EVALUATION REPORT: Facebook Advertising

Grantee Agency: Colorado Division of Child Support Services

Date Submitted: July 2020

Title of Intervention: *Facebook Advertising*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Colorado Child Support Services Program (CSS) was awarded a digital marketing demonstration grant from the Office of Child Support Enforcement to investigate the effectiveness of utilizing digital marketing to reach and attract more families to the child support program. CSS has designed and is implementing three time-bound marketing interventions including a redesign of the CSS website, Facebook sponsored advertising, and internet advertising through website remarketing and geo-fencing (location-based digital advertising).

This report is an evaluation of the second intervention, Facebook Advertising, which was implemented on January 6 and ran through March 31, 2020. The objectives for the intervention were to:

1) Increase the number of people in the target audiences that visit the CSS website and the *Apply for Services* page; and

2) Increase the number of child support applications submitted by 2% from baseline (a comparable period in the previous year).

Two research questions were posed in this examination of the intervention's results:

1) How are Facebook advertisements associated with activity on the CSS *Apply for Services* webpage?

2) Are Facebook advertisements associated with changes to the number of applications and application-related activities such as inquiries or contacts with county offices, application downloads, and initiating applications on the website?

The evaluation included gathering and analyzing data on viewers' responses to the advertisements, website activity, new child support applications, and county inquiry contacts.

Marketing consultant Maggie Spain of Spearca Communications led an iterative process to develop two separate Facebook advertisements. This process engaged CSS staff, the Digital

Marketing Advisory Committee, and the Department of Human Services Family Voice Council. Both advertisements posed the question "Do you need help getting child support?" One advertisement included an infographic advertising CSS as a family-focused, supportive agency. The second advertisement had a stock photo of two children accompanied by straightforward language indicating what services parents might access once they submit the child support application fee. The advertisements were demographically targeted to 62 zip codes in six participating counties (Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Delta, Denver, Montrose).

The performance metrics from the advertisements indicated:

- Advertisements appeared on the Facebook feeds of 87,650 individuals.
- 1,884 responses to the call to action to visit the *Apply for Services* page on the CSS website.
- The two advertisements performed equally well and prompted comparable response numbers.
- Almost all Facebook-referred website users were new to the CSS website, suggesting that targeting areas with higher numbers of single parents and lower numbers of existing custodial parents was effective in reaching eligible parents new to child support.
- Once Facebook-referred users reached the CSS *Apply for Services* webpage, most left quickly without visiting additional pages.
- Users that remained on the website primarily navigated to pages that were enrollment related. Some also visited pages on enforcement and modifications, which may reflect further influence of the Facebook advertising content.

The number of new, non-assistance child support applications received during the intervention period was examined relative to the baseline period in an attempt to measure the influence of the Facebook advertisements. There were slightly fewer child support applications submitted during the intervention period (663) compared to the 2019 comparison period (684). Other application-related indicators also did not produce compelling evidence of the Facebook advertisement's influence.

The Facebook Advertising intervention was effective at prompting new users to visit the CSS website. While most of these website visitors stayed on the site for only a brief period, it is possible they returned later to learn more or initiate an enrollment application. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine if this is the case from the data available. Facebook and other forms of digital marketing advertising that prompt viewers to click on a link to a website do not require much effort from the viewer. By contrast, the process of applying for child support is a complex off-line activity that requires gathering and reporting information and may take several hours to complete.

The gap between the ease of clicking on a link to a website and the task of submitting a hard-copy application for child support makes it difficult to ascertain the influence, or lack thereof, of an advertisement on Facebook. In addition, there are many other influences that contribute to the decision and timing of an application for child support, so the role of digital marketing advertising on application rates is difficult to isolate. Given these limitations, CSS should adjust its expectations for future digital marketing to focus on goals related to raising awareness about child support enrollment options rather than increasing applications or application-related activity.

One finding from the intervention evaluation was unexpected activity on a webpage related to the process of applying for child support. The activity on this page (*ApplicationOptions*) was not a metric of interest in the intervention itself, but suggested some child support related organic search queries were directed to this page instead of the more appropriate CSS main webpage or the *Apply for Services* page. Strategies to shift the search rankings of the new CSS homepage, *Apply for Services* page and the *ApplicationOptions* page should be explored to better direct viewers with general interests to the CSS homepage instead of the *ApplicationOptions* page. A more comprehensive solution would be to replace the *ApplicationOptions* and related pages with an online application platform integrated into the updated website.

CSS's second digital marketing intervention ended on March 31, 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic exploded across the world. While the pandemic does not appear to have affected the number of applications received during this intervention, it surely will affect new

enrollments in the coming months. CSS would be well-served to revisit and update its original plans for the third digital marketing intervention in response to this crisis.

BACKGROUND

GRANT PURPOSE

Sponsored by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, the Digital Marketing Grant Program is a 24-month demonstration project with the goal of researching how digital marketing may help the child support program more effectively reach and serve families. In September 2018, OCSE awarded funds to 14 child support agencies to test digital marketing approaches and partnerships to reach parents that could benefit from child support services and create or improve two-way digital communication and engagement.

PROBLEM

Colorado's child support caseload has been declining for the past few years. This aligns with national trends, which reflect that caseloads have been stagnating and declining over the past decade. In 2018, the Colorado Child Support Service (CSS) caseload was 144,827, down 6% since 2014.

CSS recently completed a three-year strategic plan, which addressed declining enrollments in several ways. The plan included an action item related to expanding and enhancing the face and public awareness of the program. Improving Colorado's child support website to make it easier for parents to apply for and pay child support orders was identified as a key component of that action item. Other important components included utilizing social media and digital marketing to share information with potential clients about the child support program.

Together with contractors Center for Policy Research and Spearca Communications, a team from CSS, including Keri Batchelder and Amanda Terkildsen, reviewed CSS priorities, needs, and experiences with digital marketing to develop an initial plan for the digital marketing grant proposal and implementation.

Six counties were selected to continue with the intervention. These counties – Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Delta, Denver, and Montrose – represent a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas. An advisory committee of county board representatives, CSS staff, and the grant contractors was established, and meetings were held to refine plans for the overall project. Table 1 presents the digital marketing team, and members' respective responsibilities.

Table 1. CSS Digital Marketing Team	
Role	Responsibilities
Project Sponsor *Keri Batchelder and Sabrina Montoya*	Participate in all planning meetings related to the digital marketing project. Provide review and final approval of communications and evaluation plans. Provide review and final approval of intervention creative.
Project Managers *Amanda Terkildsen and Sabrina Montoya*	Manage all consultants participating in the project. Collaborate with CSS and CDHS staff to review communications and evaluation plans. Collect feedback on proposed creative. Work with CSS to obtain relevant data related to interventions and share with consultants.
Advisory Committee *Representatives of County and State Child Support Offices*	Review and establish plans for digital marketing interventions. Implement county-based activities related to the project including inquiry logs and links to CSS' website.
Consultants *Spearca, Center for Policy Research*	Conduct research related to digital marketing mediums and target audience usage. Determine baseline and intervention data needed to evaluate intervention performance. Develop communications and evaluation plans for intervention. Provide copywriting, and graphic design services for the Facebook Advertising Intervention. Execute the Facebook Advertising Intervention. Manage all communications initiatives related to the intervention. Develop strategy for intervention implementation. Provide regular monitoring services of intervention performance.
Stakeholders *CDHS Leadership and Family Voice Council*	Review proposed creative message and identify any potential concerns related to services and legal issues.

INTERVENTION
GOALS

The overall goal of the digital marketing project is to increase child support applications.

Specific objectives of the Facebook Advertising intervention were to:

1. Increase the number of people in the target audiences that visit the CSS website and the *Apply for Services* page.
2. Increase the number of child support applications submitted by 2% over a baseline of a comparable period in the previous year.

DEVELOPMENT

CSS selected social media advertising as its second digital marketing intervention. In its application, CSS stated "the second intervention seeks to determine the effectiveness of utilizing social media advertising to promote child support services and encourage enrollment". CSS elected to specifically use Facebook advertising.

A variety of social media platforms are available for direct advertising of products and services. Facebook is the most popular social media platform among adults worldwide. According to a 2018 Pew Research Center report, two-thirds of all American adults use Facebook[1]. What sets Facebook apart as a social media platform is its ability to provide a sense of community for users. It also provides several targeted digital advertising options ranging from boosted posts to sponsored ads in newsfeeds, sidebars, marketplace, stories, and instant messaging.

CSS uses the existing Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) Facebook page to share news from the department, so this account hosted the Facebook advertisements developed for the second intervention. As of the writing of this report, the CDHS Facebook page had 4,610 likes and 5,180 followers. Spearca Communications led the development of the advertising concepts, graphic design, and content. Spearca worked with CSS staff and the CDHS

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[1] Social Media Use 2018: Demographics and Statistics, Smith & Anderson
https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/

communications team to design Facebook advertisements that were culturally relevant and in line with CDHS brand standards. The team met with CSS subject matter experts and the CDHS Family Voice Council multiple times throughout the design process. During these meetings, subject matter experts and council members gave feedback on messaging and imagery.

DESCRIPTION

The Facebook Advertising intervention involved two different creative messages directed toward the six target counties with selected populations. The advertisements were divided by county and one of the advertisements ran in each county for the entire intervention. The first creative message included a probing question – "Do you need help getting child support?" – and included text positioning CSS as a family-focused, supportive agency. The advertisement included an infographic image promoting three key child support services and a call to action to learn more. The advertisement linked to the *Apply for Services* page on the CSS website. Future references to this advertisement refer to it as the "Help" creative (Image 1).

Image 1. Facebook "Help" Creative
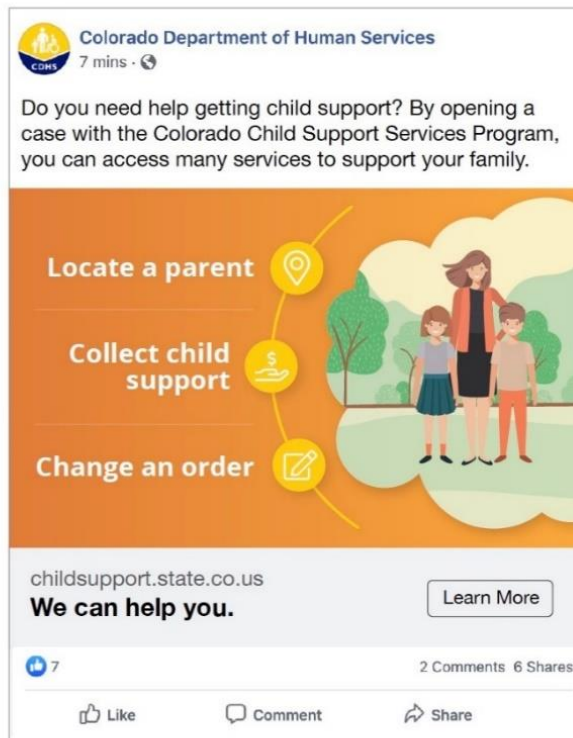
The second Facebook creative message used the same probing question – "Do you need help getting child support?" – but it was accompanied by straightforward language indicating what parents could access upon submitting the application fee. The advertisement was designed to position CSS as a more affordable alternative to private attorneys. It included a direct call to action (Apply Now) and linked to the *Apply for Services* page on the CSS website. Future references to this advertisement label this creative as "Options".

Image 2. Facebook "Options" Creative
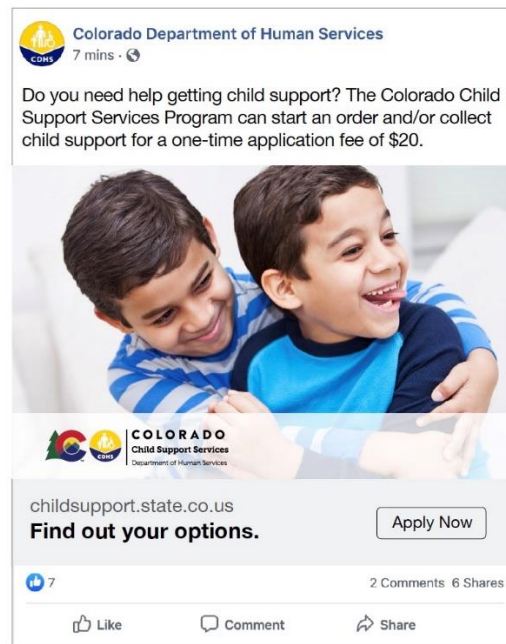
TARGET POPULATION

The targeted counties for the Colorado digital marketing project include Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Delta, Denver, and Montrose. In an attempt to reach Colorado residents in these areas who do not have existing child support orders with CSS, the team analyzed U.S. Census Bureau data to identify zip codes with a higher number of single parent households compared to custodial parents as identified by CSS records. The analysis identified 62 zip codes for targeting by Facebook advertisements during the second intervention (Table 2).

Table 2. Targeted Zip Codes for Facebook Advertisements					
Zip Code	City	County	CPs [2]	Single Parents[3]	Difference Single Parents to CPs
80229	Denver	Adams	736	2976	2240
80260	Denver	Adams	483	1857	1374
80022	Commerce City	Adams	620	1772	1152
80031	Westminster	Adams	301	1312	1011
80601	Brighton	Adams	424	1383	959
80241	Thornton	Adams	264	901	637
80019	Aurora	Adams	51	205	154
80013	Aurora	Arapahoe	611	2806	2195
80012	Aurora	Arapahoe	411	2462	2051
80015	Aurora	Arapahoe	386	2097	1711
80010	Aurora	Arapahoe	346	1982	1636
80011	Aurora	Arapahoe	507	2064	1557
80017	Aurora	Arapahoe	355	1852	1497
80016	Aurora	Arapahoe	144	1287	1143
80112	Englewood	Arapahoe	160	1226	1066
80014	Aurora	Arapahoe	245	1292	1047
80247	Denver	Arapahoe	173	1087	914
80111	Englewood	Arapahoe	72	869	797
80120	Littleton	Arapahoe	113	903	790
80110	Englewood	Arapahoe	183	750	567
80122	Littleton	Arapahoe	83	646	563
80113	Englewood	Arapahoe	72	606	534
80121	Littleton	Arapahoe	37	414	377
80018	Aurora	Arapahoe	76	393	317
80501	Longmont	Boulder	438	1758	1320
80027	Louisville	Boulder	92	1150	1058
80503	Longmont	Boulder	143	1020	877
80304	Boulder	Boulder	66	714	648
80301	Boulder	Boulder	63	669	606
80026	Lafayette	Boulder	187	641	454
80303	Boulder	Boulder	30	414	384
80302	Boulder	Boulder	20	296	276
80305	Boulder	Boulder	22	274	252

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[2] Colorado Child Support Services
[3] U. S. Census Bureau. (2019). *2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.* Retrieved from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_B19126&prodType=table

Table 2. Targeted Zip Codes for Facebook Advertisements					
Zip Code	City	County	CPs [2]	Single Parents[3]	Difference Single Parents to CPs
80466	Nederland	Boulder	12	169	157
81416	Delta	Delta	142	421	279
81413	Cedaredge	Delta	23	195	172
81419	Hotchkiss	Delta	38	139	101
80219	Denver	Denver	835	2738	1903
80231	Denver	Denver	198	1741	1543
80239	Denver	Denver	592	1917	1325
80204	Denver	Denver	411	1346	935
80249	Denver	Denver	387	1289	902
80220	Denver	Denver	198	1064	866
80211	Denver	Denver	224	1087	863
80205	Denver	Denver	358	1184	826
80210	Denver	Denver	47	871	824
80224	Denver	Denver	90	734	644
80207	Denver	Denver	257	894	637
80238	Denver	Denver	85	691	606
80236	Denver	Denver	191	783	592
80222	Denver	Denver	119	618	499
80212	Denver	Denver	98	597	499
80223	Denver	Denver	213	673	460
80237	Denver	Denver	106	513	407
80209	Denver	Denver	26	422	396
80218	Denver	Denver	62	458	396
80206	Denver	Denver	50	442	392
80246	Denver	Denver	45	324	279
80230	Denver	Denver	62	290	228
80203	Denver	Denver	32	197	165
81401	Montrose	Montrose	229	706	477
81403	Montrose	Montrose	70	228	158

The Facebook advertisements were demographically targeted to reach women in these zip codes between the ages of 30-45 with relationship statuses listed as unspecified, single, divorced, separated or "it's complicated." According to CSS records, most custodial parents are

women in this age group, which informs the demographic targets for the Facebook advertisements.[4]

TIMELINE

Table 3. Intervention Timeline	
Dates	**Activity**
11/19 – 12/19	Evaluation of response to website redesign and SEO keyword performance, revise communications plan, develop copy and design of Facebook advertisements, work with CDHS communications staff to obtain approval and set up campaigns to run on Facebook
1/6 – 3/31	Intervention 2, continuous monitoring of campaign performance, collaboration with CDHS communications staff to respond to relevant comments and inquiries, collaboration with CSS staff and counties to monitor enrollment data and inquiries
4/1 – 6/30	Analysis of data and evaluation report preparation

OUTCOME MEASURES

The objectives of the Facebook Advertising intervention were to:

1. Increase the number of people in the target audiences that visit the CSS website and the *Apply for Services* page.
2. Increase the number of child support applications submitted by 2% over a baseline of a comparable period in the previous year.

Data elements used to measure outcomes included metrics from Facebook Ads Manager, website data from Google Analytics, CSS administrative data, and customer inquiry data from counties.

Facebook Ads Manager tracked the number of impressions (number of times advertisements appeared) and total reach (number of unique viewers), engagement rates (likes, comments, and shares), and the number of click throughs to the *Apply for Services* page on the CSS website for each advertisement.

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[4] Colorado Child Support Services

Google Analytics supplied the data on website reach and traffic. Specific metrics include:

- Users – The number of new and returning people who visit a site during a set period
- New users – A new visitor to a site during a set period of time
- Pageview – An instance of a page being loaded (or reloaded) in a browser (*Pageviews* is a metric defined as the total number of pages viewed)
- Sessions – The period a user is active on your site or app
- Session duration – The average length of a Google Analytics session in a period
- Average pages per session – The average number of pages viewed in a session in a period
- Bounce rate – The percentage of visitors to a particular website who navigate away from the site after viewing only one page.
- Behavior flow – A visualization of the path a user follows from page to page or from event to event
- Application downloads – CSS enrollment forms accessed via downloads from the website
- Search activity – Information on the number of times the CSS' website appeared in an organic search and terms used for search queries

Various components, including download tracking and registration of new webpages within the CSS webpage and CSS Google Analytics, were not uniformly available prior to the intervention and thus could not be compared over time. The CSS website activated Google Analytics in late January 2019, enabled application download tracking in June 2019, and the search console feature to track search rankings in August 2019. A new landing page for child support applications, *Apply for Services*, was created with the new webpage for the last intervention, but tracking in Google Analytics was not activated until just before the launch of the Facebook advertising intervention in January 2020. As a result, a comparison period in a previous year with data derived from Google Analytics is unavailable. Instead, activity on the new application landing page, *Apply for Services,* is compared to the *ApplicationOptions* page. While this comparison has limitations, it provides a useful frame of reference.

CSS administrative data on new non-TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) applications from the targeted counties were also explored to measure outcomes. Administrative data included information on individuals who initiated a child support

application in the six participating counties for the baseline period of January 1–March 31, 2019, and the intervention period of January 1–March 31, 2020. Applications were screened to include only those applicants who were not receiving assistance (TANF) at the time of their application. Foster care and child welfare related cases initiated by counties were also excluded.

Participating counties maintained application inquiry logs as a measure of application interest and activity. Counties started logging contacts in mid-February 2019 and some continued through the intervention period. Three of the counties (Arapahoe, Boulder, and Montrose) had data for March in both 2019 and 2020; these data were included in this analysis.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) How are Facebook advertisements associated with activity on the CSS *Apply for Services* webpage?

2) Are Facebook advertisements associated with changes to the number of applications and application-related activities such as inquiries or contacts with county offices, application downloads, and initiating applications on the website?

RESULTS

SAMPLE SIZE

The Facebook advertisements were directed to 87,650 individual Facebook viewers across 62 zip codes in six counties (Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Delta, Denver, Montrose).

INTERVENTION RESULTS

FACEBOOK ADVERTISEMENT METRICS

The Facebook advertisements reached 87,650 Facebook viewers and achieved a total of 1,201,917 impressions. Details of the advertisement metrics by county are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Facebook Metrics by County							
County	**Creative**	**Impressions**	**Reach**	**Clicks**	**Reactions**	**Comments**	**Shares**
Adams	Options	207,875	15,345	342	24	1	3
Arapahoe	Options	240,632	20,684	410	31	3	
Boulder	Help	251,972	11,987	305	16	9	5
Delta	Help	103,775	3,190	151	13	2	
Denver	Help	253,419	31,498	490	46	9	7
Montrose	Options	144,244	4,946	186	8	0	4
Total		1,201,917	87,650	1,884	138	24	19

The two versions of the Facebook advertisements ran in separate geographic locations throughout the intervention period. For example, the Options advertisement was directed to zip codes in Adams County for the entirety of the intervention. Within the geographic divisions, the campaign was set up to deliver comparable numbers of impressions to similar size samples of viewers (reach) for each of the two versions of the advertisements (Table 5).

Table 5. Facebook Metrics by Advertisement Version		
	Options Advertisement	**Help Advertisement**
Impressions	592,751	609,166
Reach	40,975	46,675
Clicks	938	946

The two versions of the Facebook advertisements produced a similar number of responses to the call to action (clicks), both in terms of total numbers and the rate of mean clicks relative to the advertisements' reach and number of impressions. Both versions of the advertisements generated reactions and comments (Table 6).

Table 6. Facebook Metrics by Advertisement Version			
	Options Advertisement	**Help Advertisement**	**Total**
Total Clicks	938	946	1,884
Mean Clicks by Reach	40.63	41.57	41.10
Mean Clicks by Impression	.15%	. 15%	.15%
Reactions	63	75	138
Comments	4	20	24

Internet advertising company Wordstream compiled benchmarks for Facebook advertising by industry and determined that the average click-through rate of Facebook advertisements (number of clicks/number of impressions) across all industries is .90%. CSS's Facebook advertisements click-through rate was .15%, which is much lower than the Wordstream benchmark. Wordstream's benchmarking does not include government or social services advertising, so its value in comparing to CSS's Facebook advertisements is limited, but Wordstream's benchmarking is one of only a few readily available sources of information. Commercial advertising focused on selling products, which is largely what the Wordstream benchmarks report, is quite different than the advertisements used in this intervention. For one thing, the Wordstream benchmarks include remarketing advertisements, where viewers are presented with an advertisement for a product previously viewed on Facebook or through an internet browser, so the advertisements are in effect following up on viewers previously demonstrated interest, which was not the case with this intervention's advertisements. In addition, the decision to apply and the complex process of completing a child support application is a much different activity than making a purchase, which is the goal of other advertisements included in Wordstream's benchmarking. Advertisements encouraging enrollment in services like child support inherently may not lend themselves to higher click-through rates.

As shown in Table 7, the advertisements were displayed more often in the zip codes of less populous counties. In Boulder, Delta, and Montrose counties, the advertisements were displayed an average of 21-33 times on viewers' Facebook newsfeeds. By contrast, the

advertisements displayed in the newsfeeds of viewers in zip codes within the larger counties of Adams, Arapahoe, and Denver were displayed an average of 8-14 times. The rate of responses to the call to action (clicks) decreased with more exposure. While this could suggest that advertisements displayed fewer times produce better results, there is a correlation between the number of clicks per exposure and the reach of the sample, with smaller samples producing fewer clicks, $r(6) = .991$, $p = .000$; significant at the 0.01 level. As a result, no conclusions on the rate of response to the call to action relative to the number of exposures can be drawn.

Table 7. Clicks by Number of Times Advertisement Displayed and Reach						
County	Advertisement Version	Reach	Average number of times ad displayed	Clicks	Average clicks by number of times ad displayed	Clicks by Reach
Adams	Options	15,345	13.55	342.00	25.25	44.87
Arapahoe	Options	20,684	11.63	410.00	35.24	50.45
Boulder	Help	11,987	21.02	305.00	14.51	39.30
Delta	Help	3,190	32.53	151.00	4.64	21.13
Denver	Help	31,498	8.05	490.00	60.90	64.28
Montrose	Options	4,946	29.16	186.00	6.38	26.59

Facebook viewers have the option to record a reaction to an advertisement or post. As shown in Table 8, a total of 138 reactions were recorded in response to the Facebook advertisements, which is few relative to the reach of the advertisements (.16%). Seventy-eight percent (111) of the reactions were positive, either "like" or "love". Five reactions were angry, and 22 were "haha."

Table 8. Reactions to Facebook Advertisements						
County	Advertisement Version	Love	Like	Haha	Angry	Total
Adams	Options		17	6	1	24
Arapahoe	Options	2	26	3		31
Boulder	Help		12	3	1	16
Delta	Help		13			13
Denver	Help		34	9	3	46
Montrose	Options		7	1		8
Total		**2**	**109**	**22**	**5**	**138**

Comments viewers made in response to the advertisements were recorded. CSS chose to proactively follow-up on comments by determining if the individual making the comment had an active case and, if so, forwarding the comment to the county serving the respective client so follow-up could be conducted. A total of 22 comments were made by 16 individuals, with three viewers commenting twice (Table 9). Most comments (59%) were made by individuals without a child support case in Colorado. However, 36% of commenters did have active cases. Comments were sorted into 7 categories based on content. Forty-one percent (9) of the comments were statements about how child support is ineffective. According to CSS records, 4 of these comments were made by individuals without an active case, 3 had cases where the non-custodial parent has not been located, and 2 comments were made by individuals with active cases and recent payment activity. Overall, the rate of comments (.02%) was small relative to the reach of the advertisements.

Table 9. Comments to Facebook Advertisements	
Total number of comments	22
Number of individuals making comments	16
Nature of Comment	
Question about process	2
Negative comment about child support services	3
Child support is ineffective statement	9
Response to previous comment	4
Non-custodial parent	2
Reaction to advertisement	1
Thanks for services	1
Case Status of Commenters	
Active case	8
Closed case	1
No case	13

WEBSITE ACTIVITY INDICATORS

Google Analytics is a tracking feature that compiles multiple metrics related to website activity. While Google Analytics provides robust information on many aspects of website activity, it is not possible to completely align metrics with another source such as Facebook Ads Manager. Google Analytics tracking relies on the user having Java, images, and cookies enabled. It is further limited by the fact that users can exit before the tracking code in Google Analytics is able to load. In some cases, Google Analytics uses sampled data to report its metrics, which limits alignment with other sources. Even with these limitations, Google Analytics is a useful tool for gathering information on activity trends of websites and individual pages within a website.

Facebook-Referred Activity Metrics

Metrics for the Facebook intervention period (January 6–March 31, 2020) were compiled from Google Analytics and reviewed to illustrate website activity related to the Facebook advertisements. Facebook viewers who clicked on an advertisement were directed to the *Apply for Services* page on the CSS website. Facebook Ad Manager indicated that there were 1,884

click throughs to this page from the advertisements; Google Analytics showed that there were 787 Facebook advertisement referrals.

As shown in Table 10, almost all the sessions (88%) on the new *Apply for Services* landing page were directly referred by the Facebook advertisements. Ninety-four percent of the sessions started through a Facebook referral were from users who were new to the CSS website. Sessions averaged 1.54 pages and lasted an average of 26 seconds. The bounce rate (percent of viewers who leave site after viewing this page) was 57% for the *Apply for Services* page overall, and 71% for the Facebook referred sessions. The overall bounce rate of the *Apply for Services* page is consistent with benchmarks provided by CXL for government sites (55.06%), but the Facebook-referred bounce rate exceeds both this metric and the average benchmark for social media referred sessions (54%).[5] These data suggest that most Facebook-referred sessions were from new users whose sessions were brief in duration and consisted of only visiting the *Apply for Services* page.

| Table 10. Referral Sources and Session Characteristics *Apply for Services* Webpage							
Source	**Sessions**	**% of Total Sessions**	**% New Sessions**	**New Users**	**Bounce Rate**	**Pages / Session**	**Avg. Session Duration**
Facebook	787	88.03%	93.77%	738	70.90%	1.54	25.92
Google	52	5.82%	0.00%	0	73.08%	1.83	58.35
Direct	33	3.69%	69.70%	23	60.61%	2.39	402.73
Bing	14	1.57%	0.00%	0	57.14%	3.07	255.36
Other	8	0.89%	0.00%	0	50.00%	2.60	115.15
Total	894		85.12%	761	56.86%	2.43	146.46

Apply for Services Page Metrics

Since the Google Analytics tracking feature for the *Apply for Services* page was activated just prior to the intervention, there is not a retrospective period that could be used as a baseline and compared to the intervention period. It is helpful, however, to have some basis of comparison. In the evaluation for the first intervention (New Website), metrics on the *ApplicationOptions* (also referred to as the *Eapplication* page) webpage were used to illustrate

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[5] https://cxl.com/guides/bounce-rate/benchmarks/

the comparison of webpage activity between the intervention and a baseline period. Activity associated with each, and occurring during the intervention period, was compared to provide some form of reference.

Both the *Apply for Services* and *ApplicationOptions* pages address enrolling in child support. The *Apply for Services* page provides general information about the process of applying for child support. It also provides access to the full suite of navigational tools built into the new website, including the "Apply" box, which takes viewers to the *ApplicationOptions* page.

Image 3.

Apply for

Services
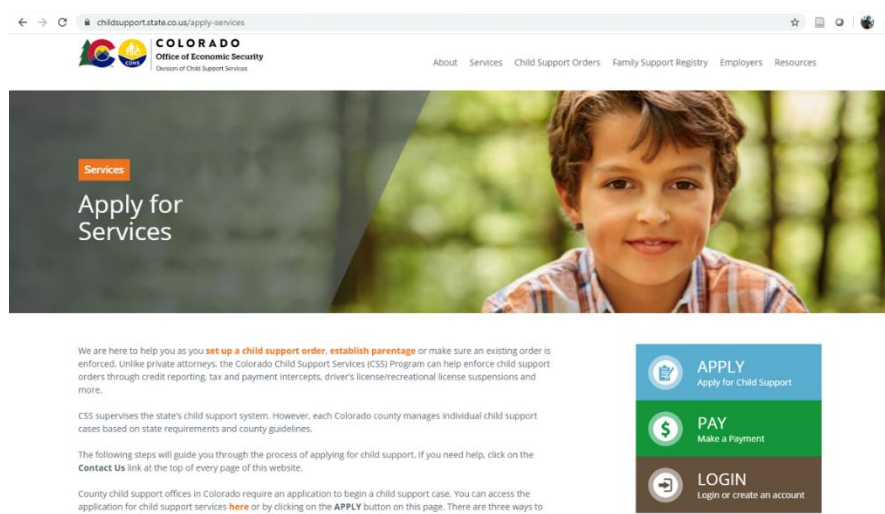
Webpage

The *ApplicationOptions* page is accessible from most of the pages on the DSS webpage by clicking on the "Apply" box. Unlike other pages within the website, the *ApplicationOptions* page was not updated during the first intervention as there are navigational requirements from the *ApplicationOptions* page that limited the ability to update it. The page provides detailed information and tools so individuals can start the process of applying for child support. Viewers are taken through a series of pages that screen potential applicants by county and set out clear parameters and expectations for CSS services. Viewers can download application forms, get contact information for county offices, and begin to fill out an application online that can then be downloaded and submitted to a county office (an online child support application submission option is not currently available). The full suite of navigational tools available on other pages in the CSS website is not available on the *ApplicationOptions* page.

Image 4. *ApplicationOptions* Webpage

While sessions that began on either page may include visits to the other page, the metrics presented from landing page sessions do not include session duplications. In other words, if a session began on the *Apply for Services* page and included a visit to the *ApplicationOptions* page, this session activity is recorded only as a part of the *Apply for Services* landing page metrics and not the *ApplicationOptions* landing page metrics. This comparison provides a frame of reference for activity on the two sites. However, few firm conclusions can be drawn as viewers may visit both pages and the pages have different user navigation options (*ApplicationOptions* has limited navigational capacity) or referral sources (Facebook advertisements only referred to the *Apply for Services* page).

The comparison of metrics for the two pages begins with Table 11. Since most of the landing page activity (86%) on the *Apply for Services* page originated with a referral from the Facebook advertisements, landing page activity on the *Apply for Services* page serves as a proxy for Facebook-related activity. The metrics suggest that the *Apply for Services* page had a higher rate of sessions by new users (85%) than the *ApplicationOptions* page (55%). There were fewer

sessions on the *Apply for Services* page (14%) that continued to a second page than the *ApplicationOptions* page (37%).

Webpage	Number of Sessions	Referred by Facebook	% Facebook Referral	New Users	% New Users Sessions	Sessions Arrived	Sessions Dropped Off	% Viewers Remaining
Table 11. Comparison of *Apply for Services* and *ApplicationOptions* Webpages								
Apply for Services	920	787	85.54%	781	84.89%	787	737	13.72%
ApplicationOptions	3,823	22	.58%	2,092	54.72%	3,823	2,092	36.62%

While most of the sessions referred by Facebook ended on the *Apply for Services* page, some sessions continued to other pages. The characteristics of these sessions were examined and compared to the sessions that started with the *ApplicationOptions* page. The sessions that extended beyond the landing page for three interactions for both pages were compared in the Behavior Flow function in Google Analytics (Table 12). Again, the comparison is limited. The pages visited were categorized into 6 groups: application related, referral to local county office (possibly also application related), existing cases, return to the main webpage, enforcement or modification related, and logging into the Family Services Register (FSR).

Most activity on both pages was application related. Sessions that began on the *Apply for Services* page had a higher rate of visits (6%) to pages related to modification or enforcement than the *ApplicationOptions* page (1%). This may be reflective of the Facebook advertisement content on the range of CSS services available, including enforcement and changing an existing order. Applications for child support are submitted to counties, so the higher rate of county referral activity for the *Apply for Services* page (11%) compared to the *ApplicationOptions* page (4%) could suggest that there was more application related activity on the *Apply for Services* page. Correspondingly, sessions that started with the *ApplicationOptions* page included more activity on pages not related to the application process, such as existing cases, the main page, and logging into the FSR.

Table 12. Comparison of Webpage Behavior Flow Interactions				
January 6–March 31, 2020				
	Apply for Services		*ApplicationOptions*	
	Pages Viewed	**Percent**	**Pages Viewed**	**Percent**
Application	121	61.42%	1,690	59.32%
County Referral	21	10.66%	128	4.49%
Existing case	23	11.68%	561	19.69%
Main Page	11	5.58%	263	9.23%
Enforcement/ Modification	10	5.08%	27	0.95%
Log in to FSR	11	5.58%	308	10.81%

While both pages' metrics demonstrated viewing activities related to the application process, it appears that users who continued from the *Apply for Services* landing page viewed pages more focused on the application process than those that began on the *ApplicationOptions* page. The comparison is of limited value, given the constraints described, but the amount of page view activity on non-application related pages by those who started on the *ApplicationOptions* page is notable by itself. The *ApplicationOptions* page has limited value as a starting page for anything but the application process. There are no navigational arrows on the page and the only way to arrive at other content area pages is by manipulating the address in the address bar, which is a cumbersome process. This raises the question: Why did so many users start their sessions on the *ApplicationOptions* page (with its limitations) if their interests were not on application-related issues?

Search Engine Metrics

Non-application related activity on the *ApplicationOptions* page might be explained, in part, by the role of search engines in directing viewers to the page. During the intervention period the *ApplicationOptions* page had an average search position rating of 3.28 on multiple child support-related terms. This means that the page was listed near the top of the list of website options generated through an organic internet search using common child support terms (Table 13).

Table 13. Search Console Metrics for *ApplicationOptions* Webpage				
Search Query	**Impressions**	**Clicks**	**CTR**	**Average Position**
colorado child support	38,320	123	0.32	1.00
child support colorado	17,099	170	0.99	1.26
child support	8,647	34	0.39	2.06
co child support	1,979	1	0.05	1.00
denver child support	1,658	0	0.00	4.43
childsupport	1,355	1	0.07	1.53
child support colorado springs	1,265	1	0.08	8.18
colorado child support enforcement	1,201	6	0.50	1.94
colorado springs child support	1,172	0	0.00	7.16
childsupport.state.co.us	1,148	6	0.52	1.00
Total/Average	98,396	836	0.85	3.28

By contrast, the *Apply for Services* page did not generate any results from search queries, likely due to it being new. Interestingly, during the intervention period, the *ApplicationOptions* page had a much better position rating (3.28) than did the CSS main webpage (18.38) with similar search terms (Tables 13 & 14). The reason the *ApplicationOptions* page had a higher position rating than the CSS main website is beyond the scope of this analysis, but one possible influence, according to marketing consultant Maggie Spain from Spearca Communications, is that many Colorado county child support websites link to the *ApplicationOptions* page rather than the CSS main page. Links from other pages drive up Search Console ratings, as does historical activity, so longevity of the *ApplicationOptions* page relative to the new CSS main homepage is also a factor.

Table 14. Search Console Metrics for CSS Main Webpage				
Search Query	Impressions	Clicks	CTR	Average Position
colorado child support	38,359	23,435	61.09	1.01
child support	37,666	7,564	20.08	10.07
child support colorado	17,115	9,154	53.49	1.26
colorado child support login	6,824	137	2.01	2.73
family support registry	6,525	21	0.32	7.78
child support office	4,499	25	0.56	16.61
colorado child support registry	3,366	35	1.04	4.19
child support services	3,215	84	2.61	17.72
child support registry	3,018	39	1.29	6.88
child support website	2,970	32	1.08	8.93
Total/Average	251,829	48,030	19.07	18.38

The high search ranking for the *ApplicationOptions* page and the amount of non-application related activity on the page suggest this is an issue that needs attention. Some viewers seeking general information on child support are being directed to the *ApplicationOptions* page instead of the broader CSS main webpage. The CSS main webpage offers clear navigation tools to a variety of child support topics and is intended to direct viewers to what they need; the *ApplicationOptions* page is not set up to do this.

While this issue is not specific to the Facebook Advertising intervention examined here, it is relevant to CSS' digital marketing project as a whole. The back-end technological requirements of the *ApplicationOptions* page and the pages that follow were not compatible with the updates of the overall website update (first digital marketing intervention), so the *ApplicationOptions* and related pages are operating in a somewhat parallel way to the overall CSS website. The search ranking issue described here is one consequence of this dynamic. While efforts could be made to shift the search rankings for the CSS main webpage and the *ApplicationOptions* page, a more comprehensive fix would be to update the *ApplicationOptions* and related pages with an online application platform that could work seamlessly within the CSS website. CSS has

expressed interest in creating an online application platform, and this issue supports the need for the development of an online platform.

CHILD SUPPORT APPLICATION ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Child Support Applications Initiated

The number of child support applications submitted, along with other indicators of application related activity, including inquiries and contacts to county offices, were examined in the evaluation for the Facebook Advertisement Intervention.

While the intention of this intervention was to increase child support and modification applications, the actual relationship between the intervention and application rates cannot be determined in the absence of an experimental research design. Instead, application-related information is examined for evidence that might suggest a relationship between the intervention and application-related activities, such as applications received, application downloads, applications initiated on the website and rates of inquiries.

The number of total child support applications received during the intervention period (663) was slightly less than during the baseline period. Denver County had the largest number of applications in both periods while Delta County had the fewest. Adams and Denver counties had more applications in the intervention period compared to baseline and the other counties had fewer applications. These data are shown in Table 15.

Table 15. Comparison of Child Support Applications Submitted (Administrative Data)				
County	Baseline N=684	Intervention N=663	Difference	Percent Change
Adams	147	151	4	2.72%
Arapahoe	217	193	-24	-11.06%
Boulder	67	59	-8	-11.94%
Delta	10	8	-2	-20.00%
Denver	225	235	10	4.44%
Montrose	18	17	-1	-5.56%
Total Child Support Applications Submitted	684	663	-21	-3.07%

The characteristics of child support applicants and family qualities were very similar in the baseline and intervention periods. The mean age of custodial parents was 36 in the baseline period and 35 in the intervention period. As shown in Tables 16 & 17, most were female, and 65% of parents in both periods were never married. The mean number of children in both periods was 1.4. There were more non-custodial parent applicants during the intervention period (30) than the baseline period (18) and the percent of fathers as custodial parents increased slightly during the intervention period.

Table 16. Characteristics of Child Support Applicants by Period (Administrative Data)				
	Baseline n=684	Intervention n=663	Difference	Percent Difference
Mean Age of Custodial Parent	35.7	34.6	-1.1	
Number of Female Applicants	583/87.8%	563/88.7%	-20	-3.43%
Number of Male Applicants	81/12.2%	72/11.3%	-9	-11.11%
Applicant was Custodial Parent (CP)	666/97.4%	632/95.3%	-34	-5.11%
Applicant was Non-Custodial Parent (NCP)	18/2.6%	30/4.5%	12	66.67%

Table 17. Family Characteristics of Child Support Cases (Administrative Data)				
	Baseline N=684	Intervention N=663	Difference	Percent Difference
Mean Number of Children per Case	1.4	1.4		
Mean Age of Child(ren)	9.1	8.3	-0.8	
CP is Father	63/6.2%	88/6.9%	25	39.68%
CP is Mother	565/82.6%	545/82.2%	-20	-3.54%
CP is Relative or Guardian	48/7%	51/7.7%	3	6%
Percent of Cases with Never Married Parents	448/65.5%	427/64.4%	-21	-4.69%

Application Form Downloads

Eleven applications were downloaded from the website from sessions that began on the *Apply for Services* page, based on referrals from the Facebook advertisements (Table 18). Sessions that began on the *Apply for Services* page (1.19%) were less likely to result in the download of an application form than those that began on the *ApplicationOptions* page (10.38%).

Table 18. Application Downloads			
Webpage	Starting Sessions	Application Downloads	Downloads as Percent of Starting Sessions
Apply for Services	920	11	1.19%
Eapplication	3,823	397	10.38%

Applications Initiated on the Website

Table 19 shows that there were more applications initiated on the website in the intervention period than the baseline period, but the number of web-initiated applications in both periods was small relative to the total number of applications initiated.

Table 19. Web Initiated Applications			
Baseline Period		Intervention Period	
Number	Percent of Total Applications	Number	Percent of Total Applications
5	1%	15	2%

Application Inquiries

The number of application-related inquiries, or contacts, to select counties as recorded through individual county logs decreased from the period of March 2019 to March 2020 (Table 20). The overall number of inquiries also decreased by close to 1000 contacts. While this could be interpreted as a decrease in application-related activity, it could also mean that more individuals got the information they needed on the website. However, neither conclusion can be drawn from the data available. The data here are limited by the diversity of county protocols for responding to application-related inquiries and recording the contacts. Some counties have dedicated staff responding to inquiries. Others delegate this responsibility to multiple staff members.

Table 20. County Child Support Application-Related Inquires by Period (Contact Log Data)				
	Baseline	Intervention	Difference	Percent Change
Total County Log Inquiries	2,779	1,824	-955	-34.36%
Total Walk-in Inquiries	683	406	-277	-40.56%
Total Telephone Inquiries	2,020	1,382	-638	-31.58%
Application Inquiries	189	63	-126	-66.67%

Across the three counties supplying contact logs, most individuals who contacted the office were female custodial parents. Payment related questions were the most common issues of inquiry (Table 21).

Table 21. Selected Characteristics from Contact Logs		
Characteristic of Individual, or Inquiry	**Baseline**	**Intervention**
Female	54.54%	55.48%
Custodial Parent	53.44%	53.16%
Payment Related	55.28%	56.94%
Application Information	12.54%	13.50%
General Information	20.97%	13.56%

ANALYSIS

The first research question was: **How are Facebook advertisements associated with activity on the CSS *Apply for Services* webpage?**

The Facebook Advertising intervention reached 87,650 Facebook viewers, prompting 1,884 responses to the call to action (clicks) that led viewers to the *Apply for Services* page of the CSS website. The two versions of the advertisement performed similarly, with no significant difference between responses to the advertisements. Over 90% of users that visited the CSS website by clicking on the Facebook advertisements were new users to the site, suggesting that the advertising targeting method was effective in reaching individuals interested in but not currently engaged with CSS.

Once users reached the *Apply for Services* page, most left quickly without exploring other pages on the website. For those that did visit other pages, activity was primarily application related. While the advertisements encouraged visits to the CSS website, the short duration of visits did not lend itself to gathering much information about the process of applying.

Facebook and other forms of digital marketing advertising that prompt viewers to click on a link to a website do not require much effort from the viewer. By contrast, the process of applying for child support is a complex off-line activity that requires gathering and reporting information. It may take several hours to accomplish. The gap between the ease of clicking on a link to a website and the task of actually submitting a hard-copy application for child support makes it difficult to ascertain the influence, or lack thereof, of an advertisement on Facebook. The very limited amount of time Facebook-referred users spent on the CSS website on application related material could suggest that this type of advertising is not effective in prompting individuals to apply for child support. It is also possible that the Facebook-referred website visit was the first step of a multi-step process of deciding to enroll in child support. It is not possible to draw either conclusion from the data available.

Facebook advertisements do appear to be associated with increased activity on the CSS *Apply for Services* webpage but most activity was short in duration. Facebook-referred visitors to the *Apply for Services* page were largely new visitors to the CSS website.

The second research question was: **Are Facebook advertisements associated with changes to the number of applications and application-related activities such as inquiries or contacts with county offices, application downloads, and initiating applications on the website?**

The number of new applications received during the intervention period (663) was slightly less than those received in the same period in 2019 (684). The Facebook advertisements prompted 11 application downloads and the number of applications that were initiated on the website increased from 5 in the baseline period to 15 during the intervention period. An analysis of contact logs from counties showed an overall decrease in contacts across all subjects, including application-related inquiries. However, the small number of individuals (50) who did not leave the website at once did not lend itself to analysis of web-based application initiation.

It is not possible to associate any metrics about application form downloads with the Facebook advertisements, and it is therefore not possible to answer this research question.

LESSONS LEARNED & NEXT STEPS

LESSONS LEARNED

The Facebook advertisements reached and prompted a response from the targeted population of individuals eligible for but not using child support services. If this population remains the priority for outreach, the geographic targeting based on the number of single parents relative to the current number of custodial parents is a useful strategy to continue using. The two versions of the advertisements prompted similar responses, suggesting that they were equally effective at producing the desired response. Using similar design and content elements in future advertisements would likely produce similar response rates.

The Facebook advertising intervention was effective at prompting new users to visit the CSS website. While most of these website visitors stayed on the site for only a brief period, they may have returned later to learn more or start an enrollment application. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine if this is the case from the data available. The gap between the ease of clicking on a link and actually submitting a hard-copy application for child support makes it difficult to ascertain the influence, or lack thereof, of an advertisement on Facebook. Given these limitations, CSS should adjust its expectations for future digital marketing to raising awareness on the option of enrolling in child support, instead of actually increasing applications or application-related activity.

The other application activity metrics (downloads, web-initiated applications, and county inquiries) did not produce data useful to forming conclusions. The overall number of application downloads and web-initiated applications will continue to be useful as reflections of the updated website and should be continued. The county inquiry logs reflect different protocols and priorities and are of limited value in

measuring application-related activity and should be discontinued in the third intervention.

The comparison of activity on the *Apply for Services* and *ApplicationOptions* pages led to an unexpected discovery about the use of the *ApplicationOptions* page. While this webpage was not a focus of this intervention, the implications of its use, as illustrated through Google Analytics data, are important to the overall digital marketing project and website accessibility. When individuals search the internet for child support services using common child support terms, the *ApplicationOptions* page is sometimes listed before the CSS homepage. This could prompt individuals interested in general information to visit the *ApplicationOptions* page instead of the CSS homepage. The *ApplicationOptions* page is not intended to serve as a landing page. It does not have the same navigational tools as other pages so effort should be made to direct viewers to the CSS homepage instead. One promising strategy to explore would be encouraging county child support agencies to link to the CSS homepage instead of the *ApplicationOptions* page. A more comprehensive fix would be to replace the *ApplicationOptions* page and the pages that follow with an online application platform, integrated into the update CSS website. CSS has expressed interest in developing this platform and the experience with the *ApplicationOptions* page described here provides evidence for the need for a new online application platform.

Next Steps

The second intervention, Facebook Advertising, ended on March 31, 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic became an international health concern. As of the end of June, public-facing child support offices in many areas across the state remain closed to in-person interaction. The third intervention, website remarketing and geofencing advertising, was scheduled to launch in July 2020 but has been delayed until further notice. Significant health concerns, skyrocketing job losses, and the need for social distancing demand the focus and attention of all. Concern that child support advertising would likely get lost among these dynamics prompted the decision to delay the third intervention.

When planning resumes for the third intervention, there are several lessons from the Facebook Advertising Intervention to apply:

1. The original objectives for the third intervention should be updated to eliminate expected increases in child support applications, as it is not possible to associate digital marketing with application rates. CSS should adjust its expectations for future digital marketing interventions to goals related to raising awareness about child support enrollment options instead of increasing applications or application-related activity.

2. The design and advertising content used in the Facebook advertisements appears to prompt responses from the targeted population, so similar features could be applied to future advertisements with an expectation of similar response rates.

3. Website viewers who use general child support terms in organic searches should be directed to the CSS main webpage instead of the *ApplicationOptions* page when possible. One strategy that could prove effective in this effort would be to encourage county child support agencies to link to the CSS main webpage instead of the *ApplicationOptions* page. A more comprehensive strategy would be to replace the *ApplicationOptions* page and the pages that follow with an integrated online application process.

Circumstances in Colorado and across the world are very different than when original plans for the digital marketing project were made. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are and will continue to be widespread. Next steps for the CSS digital marketing project should include consideration of issues related to the pandemic. In particular:

1. The original digital marketing project goal of increasing applications should be revisited for the third intervention. Since the overall digital marketing project also includes reaching families served by child support, it might be useful to consider if there are important messages to deliver to current clients through digital marketing. For example, widespread unemployment caused by the pandemic will likely influence non-custodial parents' ability to make timely payments. Messages to these parents on strategies for managing their child support obligations may be helpful to avoiding arrears and enforcement actions.

2. It is not yet possible to enroll in child support online through the CSS website. Viewers can go through multiple steps on the website to fill out an application,

but the forms must ultimately be printed and submitted in hard copy to initiate the enrollment process. In the past, many of the applications have been submitted in person at county office, an option not currently available in many places across the state. Establishing online enrollment is a complex process, but one worthy of attention. The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted many business interactions and transactions to online and demonstrates the critical need for this resource.