

Evaluation Report

North Dakota Intergovernmental Improvement Project

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With the Three Affiliated Tribes



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A Re-engineered Approach to Intergovernmental Casework in Four Interventions

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Background

Grant Purpose

In 2019, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, awarded Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Demonstration grants to seven states and two tribal child support agencies. These grants provided funding to test innovations that would increase payments on intergovernmental cases and improve case processing procedures for parents. The grants required the incorporation of procedural justice principles, behavioral economics concepts, and enhanced communication strategies to accomplish the project objectives. The grantees could test improvements to system automation, staffing, data analysis, and system analysis.

The Child Support Section (CSS) of the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the Three Affiliated Tribes' Division of Child Support Enforcement (TAT DCSE), received one of the Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Demonstration grants. The goals for the project were to: 1) increase collections on intergovernmental cases; and 2) improve intergovernmental case processing procedures to increase efficiency and enhance customer service.

More specifically, CSS and TAT DCSE identified the following primary objectives of the project:

1. Improve incoming intergovernmental referrals by determining what delays or impedes the progress of a case, including the Central Registry's role in intake.
2. Improve outgoing intergovernmental referrals by refining the transfer process from field office units to the Outgoing Interstate Center (OIC), as well as identifying causes for delay or non-payment in the responding jurisdiction.
3. Assess the need for intergovernmental referrals as opposed to using in-state remedies or long-arm jurisdiction for parents residing in other states and tribes.
4. Manage North Dakota and Three Affiliated Tribes referrals, transfers, and shared cases to reduce duplication of effort.
5. Examine a sample of cases North Dakota referred to major intergovernmental partners during a period prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to identify possible causes for differences in collections of current support in intergovernmental cases versus in-state cases, as well as possible mitigation strategies to address problems.
6. Improve the ability of staff to contact the other jurisdictions' case managers directly.

Problem

North Dakota's Child Support program has enjoyed remarkable success in the collection of current support over many years, consistently ranking among the top five state child support programs based on that federal performance measure since at least 2016. Their determination to continue to improve performance led them to identify intergovernmental cases as an area with room for enhancement. North Dakota's analysis showed that cases they sent to other



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states not only underperformed in current support collections compared to their in-state caseload, but also as compared to the current support collections of the responding state. Likewise, incoming cases North Dakota received from other states underperformed in current support collections compared to North Dakota's overall current support collections. Data shows that although the collection rate for current support in cases serviced by North Dakota alone is very high at 78.4%, compared to the national average in all cases of 65.85%, the collection rate for current support in cases where a second jurisdiction is involved because the noncustodial parent lives out of state drops substantially to 48.5%.

North Dakota enjoys a solid working relationship with the Three Affiliated Tribes, which coexists within the borders of North Dakota. The two child support agencies naturally overlap in families receiving various services including child support. Both agencies share an interest in improving their processes and outcomes. One of the problems both agencies identified was that case records in each agency's system did not consistently reflect the understanding of the cases' statuses in the other agency's caseload. Some cases were worked independently by each agency unbeknownst to the other. Other cases referred by one agency were unknown to the other agency. This resulted in duplication of effort, confusion for families and employers, and disruptions to the payment flow.

Project Initiation

On September 30, 2019, OCSE awarded CSS, in collaboration with TAT DCSE, a demonstration grant for its Child Support Intergovernmental Improvement Project (project). CSS issued a request for proposals and conducted a public procurement process for a qualified and experienced vendor to assist in administering the project. The Center for the Support of Families (CSF), a Division of SLI Government Solutions, was awarded the contract, effective January 1, 2020. CSF subsequently merged with Public Knowledge® (PK), and PK has been the management consultant since January 2021.

The two-year grant had three phases: Planning and Analysis, Implementation, and Evaluation.

During the Planning and Analysis phase, CSS continuously worked toward implementing Electronic Document Exchange (EDE), with statewide implementation taking effect October 1, 2020. CSS utilized EDE in collaboration with the successful workflow processes already in place statewide to improve timeframes and communication with other states during the Implementation phase.

Mitigating Circumstances

Two significant events coincided with the grant period:

- CSS reorganized their team. Originally, CSS structured staff primarily by location, with functions assigned within each of the eight field offices. After the reorganization, most field staff were organized into functional units, performing specialized casework such as enforcement and establishment, and reporting up a centralized chain of command.



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While changing the organization at the same time interventions were tested might not have been ideal, measured outcomes indicate the interventions do not appear to have suffered. Additionally, the project team was able to align the implementation of certain interventions with the inception of newly formed units. For instance, a newly formed Tribal Unit specializing in working tribal related cases was a significant part of one intervention, while a newly formed Intake Unit which housed the Central Registry was a significant part of another.

- The COVID-19 pandemic changed much of the way staff worked. It created challenges in ensuring staff had what they needed to get their work done, determining who had to continue to report to an office instead of work from home, supervising staff who were not physically present, accomplishing court hearings, and more electronic and virtual communication with colleagues and parents. The pandemic also caused significant unemployment, affecting collections both positively and negatively due to extended and enhanced unemployment payments, making measurement of collections an ineffective method for assessing intervention success.

Interventions

During the Planning and Analysis phase, the project team interviewed nearly every staff member of CSS and TAT DCSE, either individually or, more often, in team focus groups. Agency staff explained the processes they used for intergovernmental case processing, identified difficulties, and suggested practical solutions.

The most significant challenges that staff identified as needing project intervention to improve intergovernmental casework were:

- The Central Registry transferred incoming intergovernmental cases to field staff with minimal preparation or review. Many of these cases contained insufficient information for staff to proceed with establishment or enforcement, causing long delays and repeated requests back to the initiating state.
- Field staff often referred cases to the OIC before exhausting in-state remedies. The premature transfers resulted in cases being transferred back to the field for more work or additional information, causing frustration and costing time.
- In some intergovernmental cases, CSS sent parents forms which must be completed before a referral may be sent to a responding state. Often parents returned these forms incomplete or unsigned, or never returned them at all.
- Records of cases between North Dakota and Three Affiliated Tribes in each agency's system did not consistently reflect the understanding of the cases' statuses in the other agency's caseload. Some cases were worked independently by each agency unbeknownst to the other. Other cases referred by one agency were unknown to the other agency.



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- Significant differences in collection rates existed between intergovernmental cases and cases at large for most states, with intergovernmental cases collecting at a much lower rate than the overall caseload.

Following the completion of the interviews, the project team compiled an extensive list of ideas and suggestions to consider as possible project interventions to address the identified challenges. The project team then facilitated an Envision Session in which 38 representatives of various staff positions and geographical locations from North Dakota and Three Affiliated Tribes participated in exercises to narrow the list of interventions to a manageable size. In teams, the participants identified:

- An approach to improving outcomes to an identified problem.
- Possible remedies and interventions.
- Responsible parties for the intervention implementation.
- Outcome measures for the intervention.

Following the Envision Session, the project team and management from North Dakota and Three Affiliated Tribes narrowed the interventions to six, using staff input as guidance for the measures and identification of responsible staff.

For each of the six interventions, a small group of project leaders, affected staff, and a PK team member designed the strategy, determined resources needed for success, refined the measures identified in the Envision Session, and developed a timeline.

During the Implementation phase, the project implemented the following six interventions.

Intervention 1: Central Registry Specialization

Goals

Prior to the project intervention, the North Dakota Central Registry was staffed by a single individual, who only conducted a cursory review of incoming referrals before forwarding the case to a field office. The field staff then reviewed the documents again, sent a second acknowledgment to the initiating state, and entered the full case, including the order and debt, into the Fully Automated Child Support Enforcement System (FACSES). When the field unit received an incomplete case, case managers would have to communicate with the other jurisdiction and take the steps necessary to gather or clarify documentation or eventually close the case with a 60-day notice. The review process was inconsistent among units and sometimes caused additional work for case managers who are not as familiar with intergovernmental processes as Central Registry staff, contributing to delays in case processing. The goal of the intervention was to have the Central Registry play a more proactive role in incoming case review so that cases transferred from the Central Registry to a field unit for establishment or enforcement were as ready as possible for the next case management tasks.



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Development

A workgroup consisting of the Project Director, Assistant Director for Case Management, and Intake and Locate Unit Administrator refined the intervention recommended by participants of the Envision Session. The workgroup identified the specific duties that the Central Registry staff would perform during the implementation period and the outcome measures.

Description

The project intervention was to transfer the responsibility of an in-depth review of incoming referrals from field staff to the Central Registry. The responsibilities included:

- Reviewing the completeness of federal intergovernmental forms and additional documents as required by the Federal Intergovernmental Forms Matrix.
- Checking FACES for existing or related cases, identifying acknowledgments and orders of parentage or support, and determining next steps.
- Considering the location of the noncustodial parent.
- Determining whether the case should be forwarded to a tribal IV-D program located within North Dakota.
- Determining whether the referral is inappropriate and should be returned to the initiating jurisdiction or should otherwise be placed in intermediate status¹ pending receipt of additional information.
- Creating the case, if appropriate, on FACES.
- Entering orders and debt on FACES and completing any necessary reconciliation or adjustments.
- Ensuring that North Dakota has jurisdiction to modify the order if review and adjustment is requested.
- Acknowledging the case and requesting any additional information the case manager may need to take the next appropriate steps in the case.
- Contacting the initiating jurisdiction with questions and resolving any issues that might impede North Dakota's ability to take the actions requested.
- Completing any necessary steps in limited assistance requests.
- Reviewing cases from foreign countries and working with the Policy Unit to provide case specific directions to the case manager when the case is transferred to the appropriate field unit.

This transfer of responsibility from field staff to the Central Registry required the development of a new enhanced procedures handbook. In addition, consistent with the reorganization of CSS, the Central Registry would no longer be staffed by a single individual but instead by

¹ During the intervention, the Central Registry was authorized to place cases in intermediate status when the case was unable to be processed due to lack of information or documentation. When a case is placed in intermediate status, the Central Registry does not formally acknowledge the case and instead requests the initiating jurisdiction provide the required additional information within 30 days. If the information is not provided, the Central Registry may return the referral to the initiating jurisdiction.



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multiple individuals in the Intake Unit that specialize in intake procedures, including incoming intergovernmental. Staff, including all Intake Unit staff, attended training on the new procedures in mid-January 2021 and full implementation occurred by February 1, 2021.

Outcome Measures

The team chose four measures to determine the relative success of the intervention:

- Number of days from receipt of the referral by Central Registry to when the case is entered in FACSES.
- The number of days from receipt of the referral by Central Registry to:
 - Order establishment for establishment cases.
 - First collection for enforcement cases.
- The number of requests for documentation or information by the Central Registry.
- The number of requests for documentation or information by the case manager after receiving the case from Central Registry.
- The number of inappropriate referrals returned to the initiating jurisdiction.

CSS compiled data on the specified performance measures for one year prior to the project intervention, from February 2020 through January 2021. This data represents pre-intervention baseline data. CSS also compiled data on the specified performance measures for each month of the project implementation from February 2021 through January 2022. The data was gathered from detailed logs maintained by the project team.

Research Question

By implementing and evaluating this intervention, the project team wanted to determine if specializing Central Registry duties would result in quicker entry of the case into the system, reduced case processing times, improved collections of current support on incoming cases, and reduced requests by field units for additional documentation from the initiating jurisdiction.

Intervention 2: Customer Service and Website Enhancements

Goals

About 30%–40% of all cases transferred to the OIC² need the custodial parent to complete documents for the outgoing referral. A major obstacle to outgoing intergovernmental referrals occurs when the custodial parent fails to complete the necessary forms. For paternity, establishment, and modification cases, the parent must fill out required intergovernmental forms for the responding jurisdiction to proceed with the case. When the parent fails to respond or delays returning the properly completed forms to CSS, the entire process slows down and ultimately creates delays in getting support to children. From February through

² Case managers in the Establishment, Enforcement, and Tribal units (functional units) transfer cases to the OIC if one-state remedies are unavailable or ineffective. The OIC prepares the intergovernmental forms, refers the case to the responding jurisdiction, and is responsible for servicing the case while it is referred to the responding jurisdiction.



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August of 2020, North Dakota sent General Testimony forms to 255 parents for completion. Of those, only 43% of parents completed and returned the forms by the end of August.

The goal of the intervention was to increase the number of appropriately completed intergovernmental forms by providing proactive and meaningful assistance to parents completing the forms.

Development

A workgroup consisting of the Assistant Director for Customer Service, OIC Administrator, OIC Lead Case Manager, FACES Administrator, Training Coordinator, and Project Director refined the intervention recommended by CSS staff during the Envision session and its measures.

Description

To increase the number of appropriately completed intergovernmental forms, CSS introduced significant changes to the information it provided parents about the intergovernmental process. CSS posted new material to its public website, including:

- Information about intergovernmental cases.
- User friendly, step-by-step assistance in how to fill out the more complex intergovernmental forms: General Testimony and Declaration in Support of Establishing Parentage.
- Links to fillable forms.

The revised Outgoing Intergovernmental page was developed, which provides:

- Details about the life of an intergovernmental case in text and visuals.
- Link to a video about what to expect from an intergovernmental referral.
- Link to a video about completing intergovernmental forms.
- Links to step-by-step slide shows for completing sample forms.
- Frequently asked questions about outgoing intergovernmental cases.



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Screenshot: Outgoing Intergovernmental Case Page of North Dakota's Child Support Website

Services

- ☒ Apply for Services
- ☒ Establish Paternity
- ☒ Establish Support Orders
- ☒ Enforcement
- ☒ Review and Adjustment of Orders
- ☐ Intergovernmental Services
 - Incoming Intergovernmental Case
 - Outgoing Intergovernmental Case**
 - Tribal Child Support
- ☒ Resources
 - Forms and FAQs

Outgoing Intergovernmental Case

If North Dakota cannot proceed with a case because one of the parents lives in a different jurisdiction, North Dakota will refer the case to the Child Support agency in the jurisdiction where the other parent lives. This is called an **outgoing intergovernmental case**. There are many **federal laws and rules** governing intergovernmental case management to ensure families receive similar services wherever they live.

Progression of an Outgoing Intergovernmental Case

- North Dakota does not have the authority to proceed with the case and the other parent lives in a different jurisdiction.
- The case is referred to the Outgoing Interstate Center (OIC), which is a team of child support professionals in North Dakota that specialize in processing outgoing intergovernmental cases.
- The OIC gathers additional information and the required forms and documents from the parent who is receiving full child support services in North Dakota.
- The additional information and required documents are sent to the Child Support agency in the jurisdiction where the other parent lives.
- The other jurisdiction opens a case and follows its local laws and procedures to take the action requested by North Dakota.

Videos and Sample Forms with Instructions

Outgoing Intergovernmental Case Video Guide	Intergovernmental Forms Video Guide	General Testimony Sample Form	Declaration in Support of Establishing Parentage Sample Form
Video	Video	Sample Form	Sample Form
Intergovernmental Child Support	Completing Forms	General Testimony	Declaration Establishing Parentage

FAQs

What does the Outgoing Interstate Center (OIC) do? +

CSS also added customer reminders to complete the forms at strategic intervals. Five days after mailing the forms, CSS sent a text message reminding the customer to complete the form, with links to the web page. Five days after the text, the OIC Lead Case Manager called the parent as an additional reminder and offer to help.

Outcome Measures

The team chose four measures to determine successful implementation of this intervention:

- Number of forms returned to the OIC by the parent.
- Number of days for the parent to return forms to the OIC.



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- Number of days from transfer of a case from the field unit to the OIC and referral to the responding jurisdiction.
- Number of parents requesting assistance in completing the forms.

CSS compiled data on the specified performance measures for one year prior to the project intervention, from February 2020 through January 2021. This data represents pre-intervention baseline data. CSS also compiled data on the specified performance measures for each month of the project implementation from February 2021 through January 2022. The data was gathered from logs maintained by the project team.

To supplement the data, North Dakota also secured monthly Google Analytics reports regarding website usage.

Research Question

By implementing and evaluating this intervention, the project team wanted to determine if the enhanced customer service and website increased the number of parents requesting assistance with form completion, increased the number of forms parents returned to the OIC, decreased the number of days it takes parents to return forms, and decreased the number of days between transfer of a case to the OIC and referral to the responding jurisdiction.

Intervention 3: Re-engineered Outgoing Interstate Center Case Transfer Process

Goals

Certain OIC procedures and practices by field staff regarding what cases were appropriate for interstate referral resulted in delays in referring the case to a responding jurisdiction, confusion about what cases were appropriate for referral, and a lack of solidarity between the units.

For example, case managers might determine that a case was appropriate for referral to another state if:

- The noncustodial parent lived in another jurisdiction and frequently changed jobs (referred to as a “job hopper”), making direct enforcement out of state difficult, or
- Collections from income withholding represented only partial or sporadic payments toward the monthly obligation.

The assigned case manager would document these facts in the case narrative as a basis for transfer to the OIC. However, the OIC might still reject the transfer in favor of attempting a one-state remedy that was not exhausted. Transferring the case back and forth between the field unit and the OIC resulted in delays in casework and contributed to friction among staff.

A second example of procedural delays was the OIC requirement that there must always be a recent postmaster verification letter indicating that the out-of-state address for the noncustodial parent was confirmed. In certain situations, such a requirement unnecessarily slowed down case processing. For example, when a noncustodial parent is receiving



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unemployment benefits in another state, but direct withholding of unemployment benefits in that state is not permitted, it would be more expedient to refer the outgoing intergovernmental case without requiring a postmaster verification, since the receipt of unemployment benefits at the address should serve as sufficient verification. Requiring a postmaster verification in this situation unnecessarily impedes case processing and receipt of known collections.

Development

North Dakota established a workgroup of staff to define case transfer processes and requirements from the field unit to the OIC. The workgroup, which included the Project Director, OIC Administrator, OIC Lead Case Manager, and lead staff from several field units, refined the intervention strategies recommended by participants of the Envision Session.

Description

The workgroup's tasks included the following:

- Identify "gray area" cases, such as those involving job hoppers and partial payors and develop the best enforcement approach to those cases.
- Consider whether address verification from sources other than a postmaster verification letter would be satisfactory.
- Clarify which remedies stay in place and which are released when a case is referred to another jurisdiction.
- Set prerequisites for transfer to the OIC, such as exhausting all available and appropriate one-state remedies and contacting the noncustodial party or the custodial party for information.
- Encourage an open dialogue between the OIC and the assigned case manager prior to case transfer.
- Consider which North Dakota actions might be successful before referring a case to another jurisdiction (keeping in mind federal timeframe requirements).
- Consider issuing a direct income withholding order when referring a case so that collections could be received until the responding state is ready to enforce the order.
- Consider what other states do in response to a referral, especially considering the pandemic, and how their anticipated actions affect the determination of whether to refer a case.
- Develop a work aid for field staff to use when determining whether to transfer a case to the OIC.

The final workgroup recommendations resulted in the development of a detailed OIC transfer checklist. The checklist must be used by field staff to assist in screening a case to determine whether transfer to the OIC for an interstate referral is appropriate. The checklist must be completed by the assigned case manager and sent to the OIC prior to transfer. All affected staff



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attended training on the proper use of the new checklist, and policy staff were available to answer questions and resolve ambiguity or disagreement throughout the implementation period.

Outcome Measures

The workgroup identified three measures to determine successful implementation of this intervention:

- Number of cases transferred from the field to the OIC after a one-state remedy either was attempted and failed or was not applicable.
- Number of transfers rejected by the OIC.
- Number of days from the date the case was transferred to the OIC to the date it was referred to the other jurisdiction.

CSS compiled data on the specified performance measures for one year prior to the project intervention, from February 2020 through January 2021. This data represents pre-intervention baseline data. CSS also compiled data on the specified performance measures for each month of the project implementation from February 2021 through January 2022. The data was gathered from logs maintained by the project team.

Research Question

By implementing and evaluating this intervention, the project team wanted to determine if field staff was appropriately attempting one-state remedies prior to transferring the case to the OIC. A decrease in the number of rejected transfers and days for referral to the responding jurisdiction would be evidence of a successful intervention.

Intervention 4: Re-engineered North Dakota and Three Affiliated Tribes Case Management Process

Goals

The interviews and focus groups with staff and leaders of both agencies identified communication and misunderstanding of procedures as primary roadblocks to smooth, shared intergovernmental casework. The goal of this intervention was to improve intergovernmental communication and collaboration between CSS and TAT DCSE.

Development

A team of tribal and state staff initially developed this intervention during the Envision Session. A workgroup consisting of the TAT DCSE Attorney, TAT DCSE Director, CSS Project Director, and CSS Tribal Unit Administrator refined the intervention and measures.

Description

Each respective entity implemented protocols and procedures that clarified case responsibility. During the project Implementation phase, they also ran periodic data matches to identify



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mismatched cases and screening referrals that may already be in the other agency's caseload. The two child support agencies also met regularly to resolve issues and discuss cases.

North Dakota:

- Assigned one team member within a specialized Tribal Unit to be the liaison with Three Affiliated Tribes on all common cases.
- Developed and implemented enhanced procedures for managing tribal-related cases.
- Created a semi-annual data match report, organizing data match efforts between the programs, reviewing cases, recommending dispositions, and completing agreed upon dispositions.
- Reviewed and addressed training needs of North Dakota staff.
- Initiated contact with Three Affiliated Tribes when they receive an intergovernmental request from another jurisdiction if the case might have a Three Affiliated Tribes connection.

Three Affiliated Tribes:

- Checked FACES for the case members when the agency received a referral or application from a jurisdiction besides North Dakota, in which North Dakota might already be involved. For example, if Three Affiliated Tribes receives a referral from Montana, Three Affiliated Tribes uses their read only, limited access to FACES to check for existing cases with the parties.
- Developed a standardized training module for case managers on how to work intergovernmental cases to train new staff and provide a refresher for experienced staff.
- Developed and implemented procedures for managing state-related cases.
- Created a semi-annual case participant report for the data match process, reviewing cases identified in the data match report, recommending dispositions, and carrying out agreed upon dispositions.

The procedures developed by both agencies covered communication preferences and direct points of contact; intake; order establishment and modification; enforcement, including special enforcement services by the tribe; locate; service of process; and transfer and closure. Each agency offered input into the development of the other's procedures. Each agency's procedures and related tools were made available to both agencies. Additionally, project team members from both agencies met regularly to discuss cases and procedures, and lines of communication were open to timely address issues as they arose.



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Outcome Measures

The project team identified the following measures:

- More transfers and fewer shared cases, as shown by:
 - The number of cases North Dakota closed and transferred to Three Affiliated Tribes.
 - The number of shared cases, defined as 1) open in both agencies' caseloads; 2) involving the same family and for the same action; and 3) no open intergovernmental referral between the two agencies.

CSS extracted data from their system monthly and Three Affiliated Tribes provided data semi-annually. When the tribe compiled data, North Dakota would create a comparison file, and staff from each agency would manually review the comparison file.

Research Question

By clarifying roles and procedures, streamlining communication between tribe and state case managers, and running periodic caseload matches, the project team sought to determine if North Dakota and Three Affiliated Tribes can reduce the number of mismatched and shared cases.

Intervention 5: Data Examination – Deep Dive

Goals

Prior to the grant announcement, CSS leadership had observed that collections on intergovernmental cases differed significantly from non-intergovernmental cases. The goal of this intervention was to better understand the reason for the variance.

Development

The director and managers of CSS initially envisioned this intervention. The Project Director and the Assistant Director for Case Management worked with the PK grant team to refine the parameters of the “deep dive.”

Years before the grant was awarded, to better understand the performance metrics in intergovernmental cases, CSS leadership had asked staff to log issues they encountered while working with various intergovernmental partners. When the grant was awarded, they refined the logging process and emphasized the importance of logging the issues.

Description

CSS and PK staff performed a “deep dive” into a sample of outgoing intergovernmental establishment and enforcement cases with some of North Dakota’s largest trading partners.

Based on the logs and data about who the most frequent intergovernmental child support partners are, CSS identified underperforming cases for six partners. PK staff manually reviewed these cases. In addition, PK and CSS leadership asked Washington Division of Child Support, also a federal grantee, to perform a similar review of cases North Dakota had referred to them.



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Outcome Measures

The project team examined the system data on cases North Dakota shares with Washington state and other key partners. Unlike the other project interventions, there were no baseline and implementation performance metrics.

Research Question

By implementing and evaluating this intervention, the project team wanted to determine if a review by contracted child support professionals could identify trends in casework by North Dakota or its largest intergovernmental partners that contribute to lower performance on intergovernmental cases.

Intervention 6: Interstate Contact Information

Goals

When parents live in different jurisdictions, case processing can be more complex and challenging. Timely, meaningful communication between workers in both jurisdictions is critical. One goal of the project was to provide staff with interstate contact information, including case manager information and resources in other states.

Development

During the interviews and focus groups, staff from every office identified as a challenge to interstate case processing the inability to contact staff easily and quickly in another jurisdiction who could answer questions and resolve discrepancies. Staff discussion during the Envision Session confirmed the importance of addressing this problem.

The Assistant Director for Case Management and Assistant FACSES Administrator refined the intervention of developing a directory.

Description

To develop the contact directory for staff, North Dakota drew from contacts that individual staff kept manually, and other lists staff had access to from child support conferences and forums.

Outcome Measures

The project team did not develop outcome measures for this intervention other than its completion.

Research Question

The project team did not identify a research question for this intervention and did not evaluate its usefulness for staff.



Results and Analysis

Background Information

North Dakota Caseload

North Dakota's caseload averaged 35,026 during the baseline period of February 2020 through January 2021, and 34,060 during the intervention period of February 2021 through January 2022, trending downward from 35,253 in February 2020 to 33,131 in January 2022. A steady 12.6% of the caseload was outgoing intergovernmental cases, while about 9% of the caseload is incoming intergovernmental cases.

North Dakota shares a small caseload with Three Affiliated Tribes. In February 2020, the first month of the baseline period, North Dakota reported having 12 incoming intergovernmental cases from Three Affiliated Tribes and 138 outgoing intergovernmental cases to Three Affiliated Tribes. Although incoming cases from Three Affiliated Tribes climbed to 18 midway through the implementation period, they were at 14 by January 2022, the end of the implementation period. In contrast, the number of cases North Dakota reported referring to Three Affiliated Tribes dropped more substantially, to 59 cases by January 2022, because of the agreed upon procedures which sought to reduce duplication of effort and increase case transfers during the implementation period.

Presentation of Data

Graphs in the body of this report may display data month-by-month or cumulatively. Cumulative data is used when the events being measured may take longer than a month to complete. For example, one measure was if a case received a payment. Even on regularly paying cases, receiving a first payment the same month a case opens is relatively unusual, and even more so for an intergovernmental referral. The cumulative count presented a picture over the course of the two years: February 2020 to January 2021 for the baseline period, and February 2021 to January 2022 for the implementation period.

Most of the data presents mean averages, which are identified as "averages." Where outlier data skewed the mean results,³ the graph depicts the median results, which are identified as "median."

The appendix at the end of this report contains an abbreviated compilation of data displayed in this report. North Dakota and Three Affiliated Tribes gathered much more data, which the project team compiled and analyzed to measure the success of the various implementation strategies.

³ A mean average for payments would add all the payment amounts and divide by the number of payments. If there was one very large payment, the mean average would skew high and misrepresent the overall representation of the other payments. In this case, the median is the middle number of the sorted list of payments.



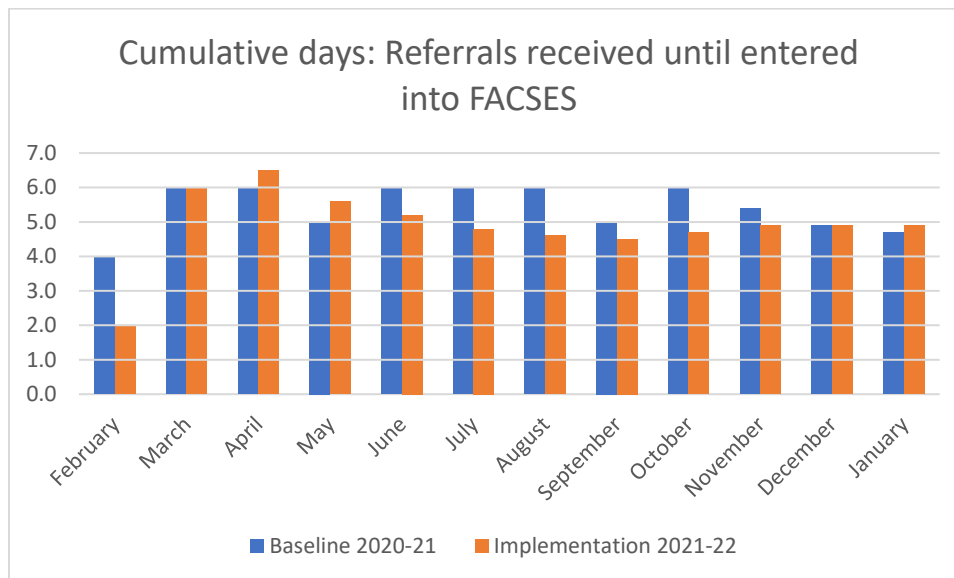
Intervention 1: Central Registry Specialization

The intervention was applied to the entire incoming caseload instead of a randomized sample. North Dakota established a 12-month baseline of data prior to implementation, and then measured the results of the implementation over another 12 months.

Approximately 9% of North Dakota's caseload is incoming intergovernmental cases. North Dakota averaged 59 new intergovernmental cases a month for the 12-month baseline period, and 52.6 new cases for the 12 months of implementation. The state's total incoming intergovernmental caseload at the start of the baseline period was 3,199 cases, compared to 3,119 at the beginning of the implementation period. At the end of the intervention, the state had an incoming intergovernmental caseload of 3,036.

Chart 1.1 shows the cumulative average amount of time it took for CSS to enter intergovernmental cases into FACES for all intergovernmental cases received between the preceding February and that month. While the cumulative average for the two years seems to have equalized by January 2022, many of the earlier months indicate improvement for the implementation period.

Chart 1.1: Cumulative Average Days from Receipt to Entry into FACES⁴



⁴ Appendix, Intervention 1, Line 16.



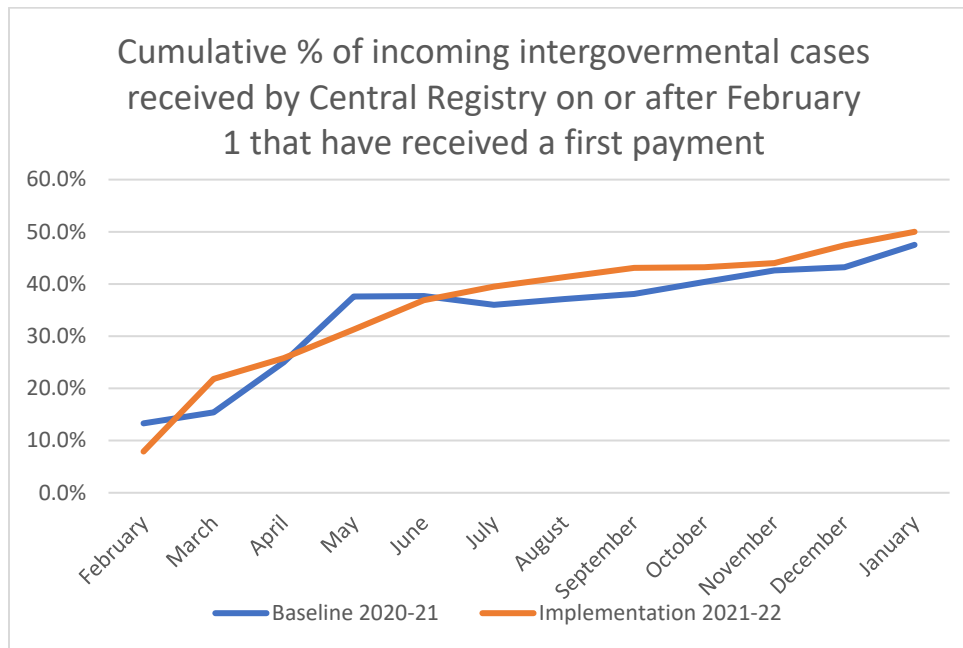
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Chart 1.2 demonstrates a slight overall increase in the number of North Dakota incoming cases that received a payment since February of the implementation year over the baseline year. This cumulative measure showed a 2.5% increase in January 2022 over the measure in January 2021, with 50% of cases having received a first payment between February 2021 and January 2022. The rise and fall of the cumulative percentage through the year results from several factors, including the addition of new cases and waves of payments from the stimulus program and tax intercepts.

Chart 1.2: Cumulative Percentage of Incoming Intergovernmental Cases Receiving a Payment⁵



⁵ Appendix, Intervention 1, Line 44.



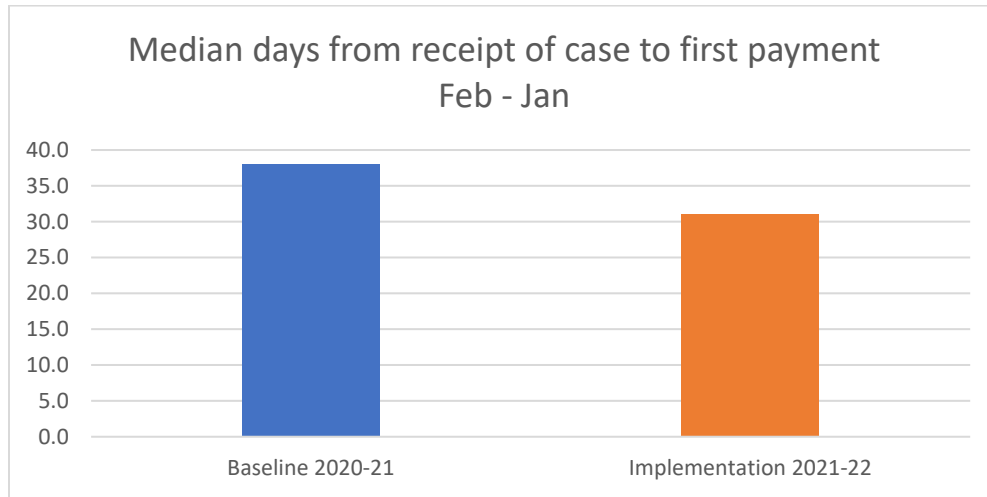
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While chart 1.2 provides the percent of North Dakota incoming cases receiving a payment over time, chart 1.3 provides the cumulative median number of days from receipt of the incoming case to first payment at the end of the baseline and implementation periods. There was a seven-day reduction in median days from receipt to first payment at the end of the implementation period over the baseline period. In other words, more cases received a first payment, and they received the payment more quickly, during implementation.

Chart 1.3: Median Days from Receipt of Incoming Intergovernmental Case to First Payment⁶



⁶ Appendix, Intervention 1, Line 46.



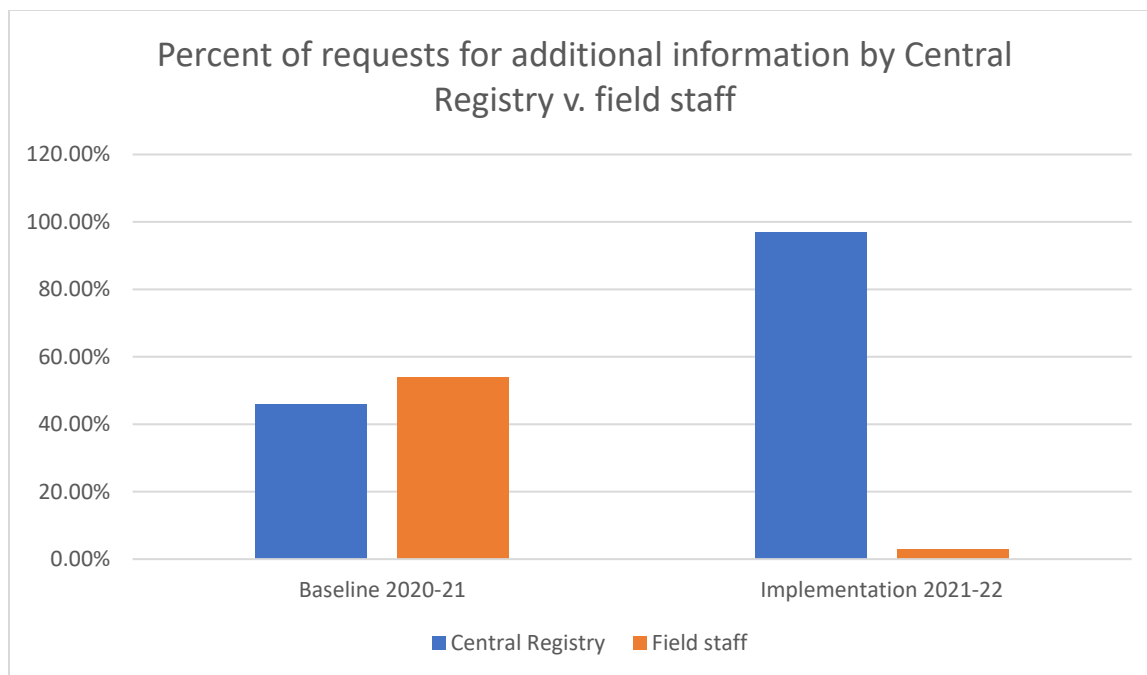
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Another notable success gained by the specialization of Central Registry resulted from the more in-depth review of intergovernmental packets and contacting the initiating jurisdiction for any additional documents and information needed to work the case. Chart 1.4 illustrates that during the baseline period, of the requests for additional information, about 46% were made by Central Registry and about 54% were made by field staff. During the intervention period, more than 97% of the requests were made by Central Registry and less than 3% were made by field staff. In fact, field staff made no additional requests for information from the initiating jurisdiction in eight of the months during the one-year implementation period.

Chart 1.4: Percentage of Requests for Additional Information by Central Registry as Compared to Field Staff⁷



Another measure, the number of inappropriate referrals⁸ returned by the Central Registry to the initiating jurisdiction, was also notable in preserving field staff time. Prior to the implementation period, the Central Registry was not authorized to return referrals. As a result, nearly every incoming referral was acknowledged and forwarded to a field unit. During the implementation period, the new procedures and more in-depth review of the intergovernmental packets resulted in about 10%⁹ of referrals received being returned to the

⁷ Appendix, Intervention 1, Lines 66 and 68.

⁸ Inappropriate referrals include cases where North Dakota had an open case that was previously closed and the reason for case closure still exists, North Dakota does not provide the service being requested in an intrastate case, or the noncustodial parent is in another jurisdiction and no enforcement remedies are available.

⁹ Of the 639 incoming referrals received in the Central Registry between February 2021 through January 2022, 67 (about 10.5%) were returned to the initiating jurisdiction.



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initiating jurisdiction as inappropriate for service. This allowed field staff to focus time on cases appropriately serviced in North Dakota.

One selected measure, the number of days from receipt by Central Registry until an order was established or modified met too many challenges for a reliable data report. The small number of orders entered or modified, and the long turn-around time due to court closures early in the pandemic, resulting in back-ups in the later part of the pandemic, muddled the compilation of the data. The data does indicate that orders took longer to enter or modify, overall, and we suspect that COVID-19 was the primary cause of the increased time.¹⁰

Staff Observations and Lessons Learned

The Project Director collected qualitative data by sending a set of questions to the manager responsible for Central Registry asking for staff observations and lessons learned related to this intervention.

Central Registry staff identified four intervention strategies that were effective:

1. The enhanced procedures handbook proved a valuable resource.
2. The thorough review of the intergovernmental packet prior to processing the case through Central Registry allowed staff to address errors, obtain missing documents, and resolve inconsistencies before sending the case to the next appropriate functional unit.
3. Entering orders and debt amounts into the automated system only took a few minutes of staff time, because they were already reviewing the documentation.
4. Having policy staff available to answer Central Registry questions and provide guidance was valuable.

The Central Registry staff recommended streamlining the tribal assessment process. Staff faced consistent challenges determining if the case had links to a tribal agency. They suggested that one indicator of a tribal connection might not be enough to signify the need for a tribal assessment and recommended an examination of whether different indicators might be needed for establishment and enforcement cases.

They also suggested adding Automated Administrative Enforcement of Interstate Cases (AEI) requests to the Limited Services section of the enhanced procedures handbook.

Central Registry staff identified the following challenges to incoming intergovernmental referrals and requests:

1. Interpreting other states' orders to determine what medical indicator should be entered into FACES.
2. Interpreting other states' ledgers (debt calculations) to enter a correct past due balance into FACES.

¹⁰ Appendix, Intervention 1, Lines 56 through 63.



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3. Becoming familiar with child support policy and procedures they had to apply to the new processes.
4. Limited-service requests often arrived without a confidential information form.

Staff addressed challenges by contacting the Policy Unit for guidance, communicating with the initiating jurisdiction, and trusting their own judgment to make the best decision possible.

The Central Registry staff's primary lesson learned was the process efficiency and consistency gained by thoroughly reviewing every intergovernmental packet. When asked by the Central Registry manager if the enhanced procedures should become permanent, the Central Registry staff responded:

"Yes. We believe the procedures are beneficial to the establishment, enforcement and review and adjustment of orders for other states. Upfront work was completed so the assigned case managers could start work right away with the case. The upfront screening by one centralized worker seems to be working well and we certainly recognize the benefits and appreciate the change. We think this has been a positive change for ND Child Support."

Intervention 2: Customer Service and Website Enhancements

During the baseline period of February 2020 through January 2021, CSS sent documents to parents for completion in 511 cases. During the intervention period of February 2021 through January 2022, CSS sent documents to parents in 334 cases. The forms needing completion were the General Testimony and, in some cases, the Declaration in Support of Establishing Parentage.

Chart 2.1 presents the cumulative percent of cases in which the parent returned the completed documents. The denominator for this percentage is the number of cases in which the custodial parent received a request to complete and return documents between February and the measured month of the graph. The numerator is the number of cases in which the custodial parent returned documents completed and signed. For example, September 2021 shows that 38% of the parents who received a request to complete documents between February 2021 and September 2021 returned the documents.

Chart 2.1 shows that the percentage of cases with documents returned by parents remained significantly lower in the first half of the implementation period. As a result, the OIC increased their outreach and offers to assist parents during the second half of the implementation period. These efforts seem to have improved the response rate for the latter half of implementation, nearing the baseline return rate. By January 2022, the cumulative return rate had improved to 40.1% as compared to the baseline rate of 43.8% in January 2021. Although the return rate did not show marked improvement during implementation, the median timeframe for return of the completed documents decreased significantly.

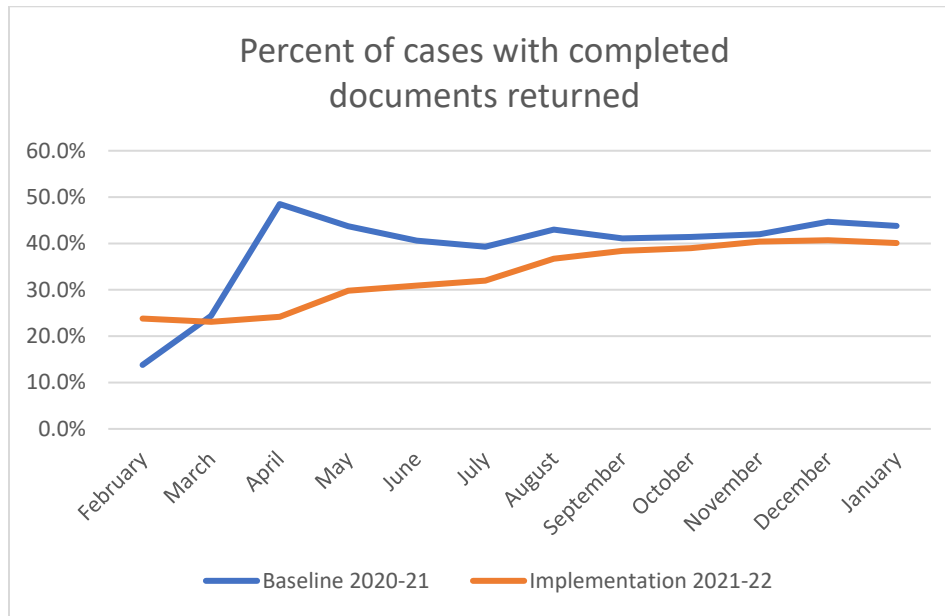


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Chart 2.1: Cumulative Percent of Cases in which the Parent Returned Requested Documents¹¹



¹¹ Appendix, Intervention 2, Line 80.



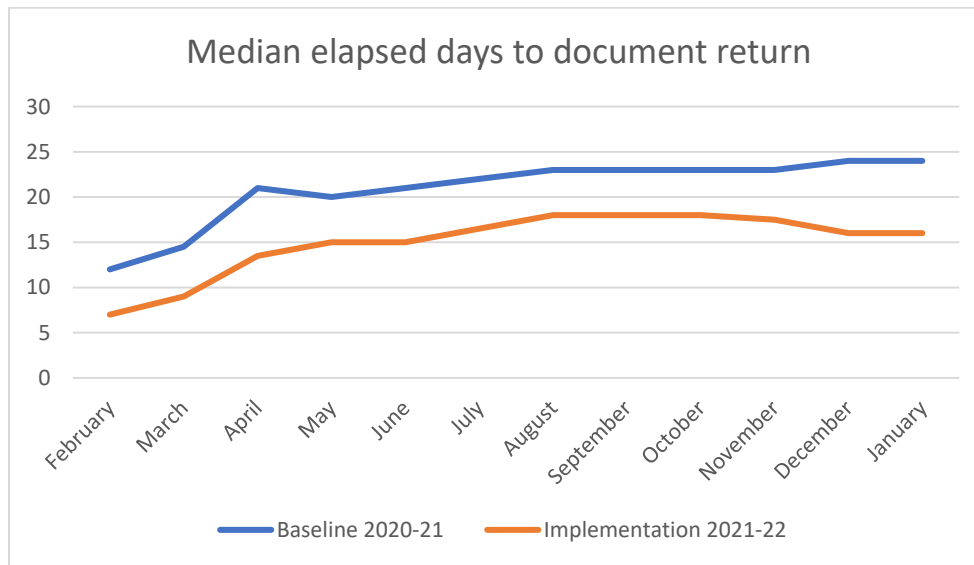
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Chart 2.2 presents the cumulative median days from when CSS requested that a parent return completed documents in an intergovernmental case until the parent returned them. When the parent returned the requested documents, it took about five fewer days to return them at the beginning of the implementation period compared to the baseline period. By the end of the implementation period, the elapsed return time had shortened even more to eight days fewer to return the forms as compared to the baseline period.

Chart 2.2: Cumulative Median Days from Request to Parent for Documents until Return of Completed Documents¹²

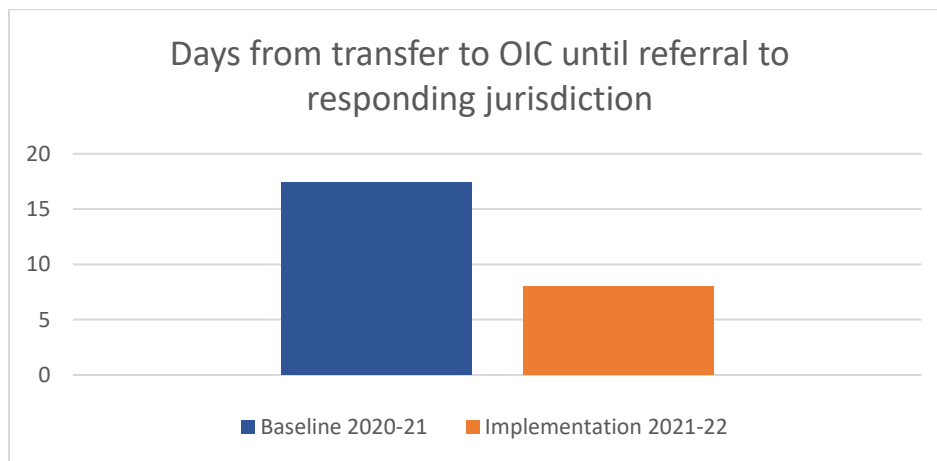


¹² Appendix, Intervention 2, Line 82.



While other implementation strategies also influenced the improvement in the number of days between receipt by the OIC of a case and referral to the responding jurisdiction, waiting for forms to be returned by parents had been identified by staff as one of the major causes of delay. The improvement in cumulative average wait time for returned documents from 17.4 days by the end of the baseline period to 8 days at the end of the implementation period resulted in improvement in the overall ability of the team to send intergovernmental packets to the responding jurisdiction timelier. The cumulative median elapsed time improved from 10 days at the end of the baseline period to 3 days by the end of the implementation period.¹³ The other strategies affecting the time from receipt of a case by OIC to its transmittal of the case to the responding jurisdiction are described in Intervention 3.

Chart 2.3: Elapsed Average Days from Transfer to the OIC until Referral to the Responding Jurisdiction as of January 2021 Compared to January 2022¹⁴



Web Analytics Data:

CSS used Google Analytics to track customers' access to their revised public intergovernmental web pages and the tools they had developed to assist parents in understanding the intergovernmental process and to complete the forms. Unfortunately, they were unable to use Google Analytics to capture information about accesses to the specific tools, but Google Analytics did monitor access to the intergovernmental pages on the site. While this precludes scientific measurement of the access and use of the tools, the data available does demonstrate clear trends in the usage of the website.

Each of the three graphs below provide data for North Dakota Child Support's entire website (in orange) compared to the Outgoing Intergovernmental page of that website (in blue). The pages went live in February 2021, and letters to parents directed them to the Outgoing

¹³ See Appendix, Intervention 2, Line 23. The median shows a more dramatic decrease in elapsed time than the mean because a few cases with a very long elapsed time (outliers) skew the mean average more than they affect the median.

¹⁴ Appendix, Intervention 2, Line 22.



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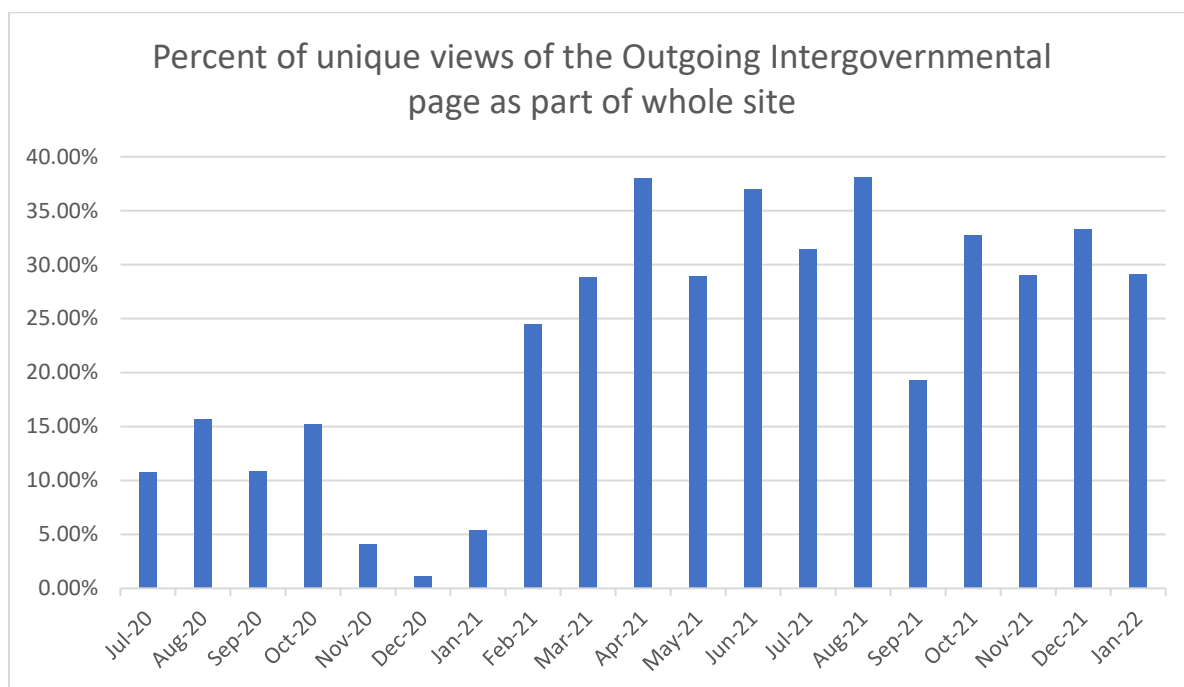
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Intergovernmental page for assistance and provided the URL, which the parent could type in directly. A few days later those same parents received a text message with links to the web page.

Chart 2.4 shows unique views of the Outgoing Intergovernmental page of the site as a percentage of all unique views to the child support web site. Following the rollout of the tools and letters to parents directing them to the web site in February, a sharp increase in visits to the website began. The proportion of those visits that were to the Outgoing Intergovernmental page rose dramatically for the duration of the implementation period.¹⁵

Chart 2.4: Percent of Unique Views to the Outgoing Intergovernmental Page as Part of the Whole Child Support Site



A “bounce” is an entrance to a particular page on a website that then leaves the website without going to another page in the site. Chart 2.5 shows that most of the entrances to the Outgoing Intergovernmental page left the site without visiting other parts of the website—they “bounced.” What is not measured by the data available is where they went, although the project team suspects a significant number of viewers took advantage of the videos and other tools made available on the page.

¹⁵ North Dakota could not filter out internal access from staff and project team members as differentiated from access by the public. Some of the unique visitors on these charts are internal views.



Chart 2.5: Bounce Rate from the Whole North Dakota Child Support Site Compared to the Outgoing Intergovernmental Page of that Site

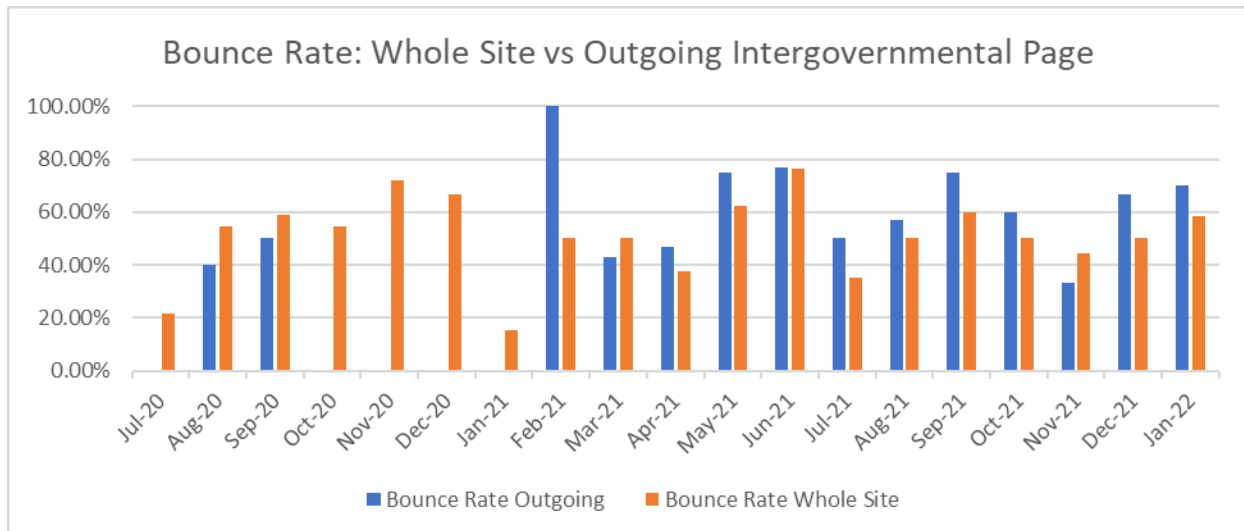
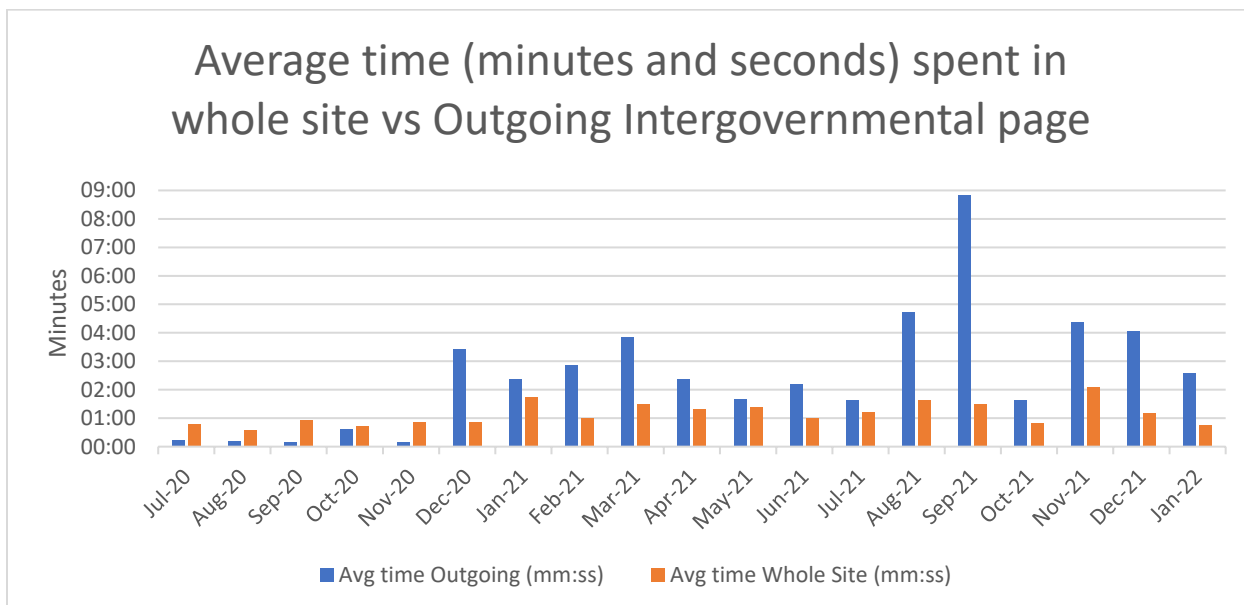


Chart 2.6 shows a significant increase in the average length of time visitors stayed on the Outgoing Intergovernmental page as opposed to the length of time spent on the website overall.¹⁶

Chart 2.6: Average Time in Minutes and Seconds Spent on Whole North Dakota Child Support Site Compared to the Outgoing Intergovernmental Page of that Site



¹⁶ Because the team was not able to filter out internal views, the uptick in views before and during the rollout in February 2021 is likely due to reviews by staff and the project team in preparation for redesigning the site.



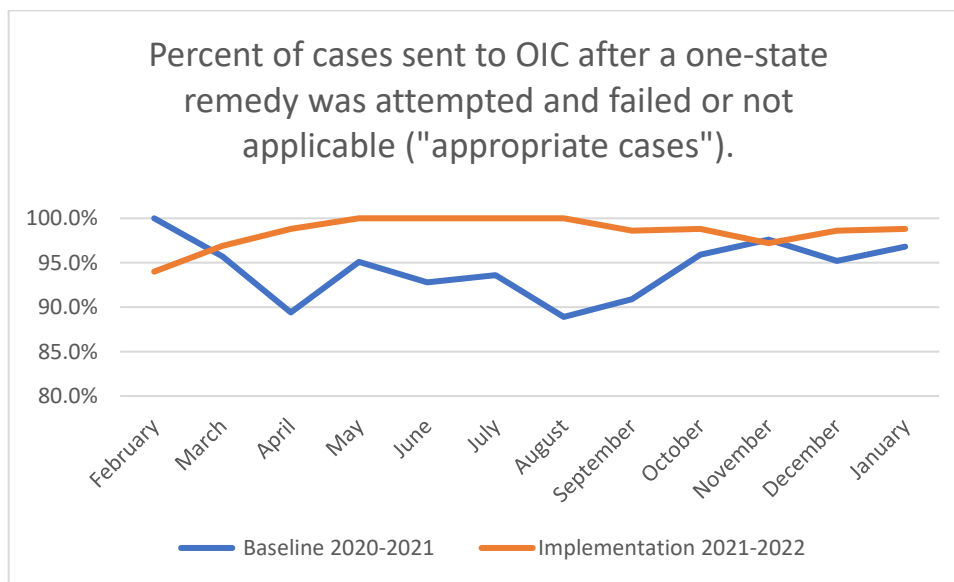
Staff observations and lessons learned for this intervention are combined in Intervention 3: Re-engineered Outgoing Interstate Center Case Transfer Process section under Staff observations and lessons learned.

Intervention 3: Re-engineered Outgoing Interstate Center Case Transfer Process

During the baseline period of February 2020 through January 2021, field unit staff transferred a total of 1,406 cases to the OIC for referrals to other states. During the Intervention period, the number of transferred cases dramatically decreased to 958.

North Dakota expects field staff to attempt available and appropriate one-state remedies on cases prior to transferring the case to the OIC. Chart 3.1 shows the percentage of cases the field transferred to the OIC that met that expectation. During the baseline period of February 2020 through January 2021, an average of 96.8% of cases met the expectation. During the implementation period of February 2021 through January 2022, 98.8% of cases met the criteria, with 100% compliance in four of the intervention months.

Chart 3.1: Percent of Cases Sent to the OIC after either a One-state Remedy was Attempted and Failed, or a One-state Remedy was not Applicable¹⁷



¹⁷ Appendix, Intervention 3, Line 13.



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The improvement in compliance from chart 3.1 is also reflected in charts 3.2 and 3.3, where the number of cases returned to field staff from OIC and the percentage of those cases demonstrates a significant reduction in cases going back to the field units from OIC.

Chart 3.2: Number of Cases Returned by OIC to the Field Staff for Further Work¹⁸

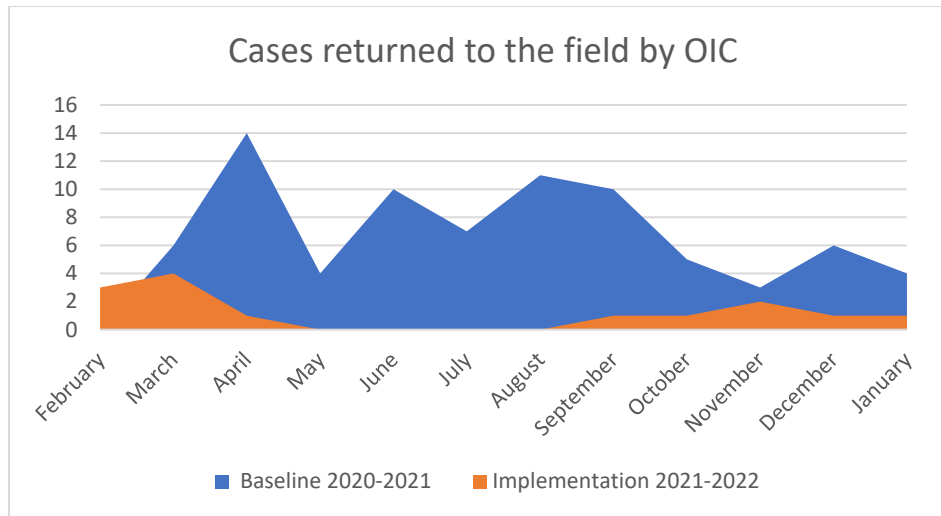
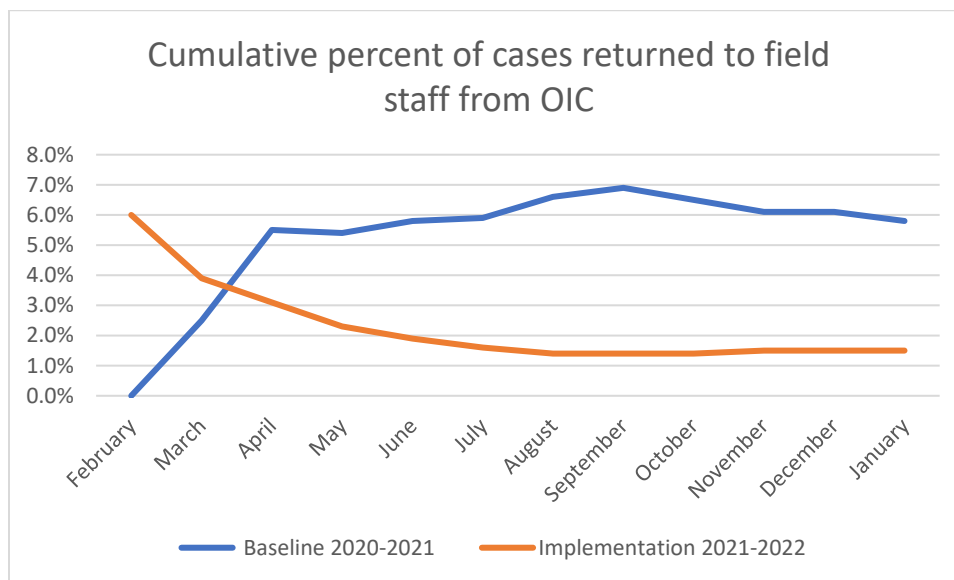


Chart 3.3: Percent of Cases Returned to Field Staff from OIC¹⁹



¹⁸ Appendix, Intervention 3, Line 14.

¹⁹ Appendix, Intervention 3, Line 23.



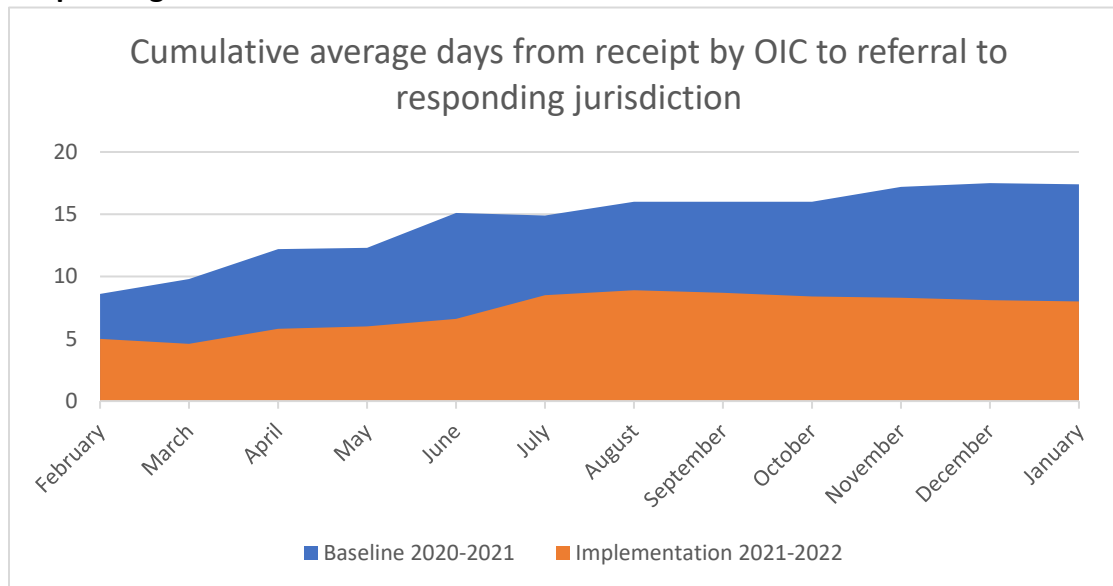
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The improvements made in communication with customers (Intervention 2), coupled with the re-engineered transfer process and better communications between the field staff and the OIC (Intervention 3), resulted in efficiencies in timely transmission of referrals to the responding jurisdiction, with a better than 50% decrease in the average number of days from 17.4 to 8 days by the end of the implementation period. The cumulative average number of days from receipt to referral during the implementation period was approximately half of the average for each month of the baseline period.

Chart 3.4: Cumulative Average Number of Days from Receipt by OIC to Referral to the Responding Jurisdiction²⁰



Staff observations and lessons learned

The Project Director collected qualitative data by sending a set of questions to the OIC Administrator asking for staff observations and lessons learned related to this intervention.

OIC staff found the feedback from field units during the workgroup sessions prior to implementation of the checklist and the customer service procedures beneficial. The field units' use of the checklist, and its inclusion in the transfer documentation saved OIC time. The process opened better lines of communication between OIC and the other units.

OIC reported one area that did not work well was that sometimes field unit staff would send a case to OIC without contacting either parent. The field unit staff check the boxes on the checklist indicating they didn't contact them, but procedure does not stop the referral from being sent to OIC.

The primary lesson is that communication with peers and customers was key to improvement.
-OIC Administrator

²⁰ Appendix, Intervention 2, Line 22.



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Most challenges early in the implementation period were resolved quickly with phone calls between managers. The primary lesson is that communication with peers and customers was key to improvement. The staff would like to see the checklist and procedures remain in place after the grant period. As one staff member noted:

“The checklist is a very helpful tool, and it makes the case managers really look at the case prior to case transfer, which assists with a quick turn-around time when the case gets to OIC.”

Staff also observed that the customer service procedures helped. They get forms back more quickly and completed correctly more often. They concede that there are always those few that do not complete everything, but this provides the opportunity to reach out to the customer and discuss the process. They added that they would like to see the website used by more customers.

Overall, OIC staff said the experience was a good one. Customers appreciated the outreach and have expressed thanks for the contact, realizing that the staff care. The procedures also created a better relationship between the customers and case managers in North Dakota.

*We believe this was a
much-needed change for
our program.
-OIC Administrator*

Intervention 4: Re-engineered North Dakota and Three Affiliated Tribes Case Management Process

Four times during the grant period, North Dakota and Three Affiliated Tribes conducted data matches and identified cases that fell into four categories:

1. Cases in which both jurisdictions had a case with the individual participants (noncustodial parent, custodial parent, and child) but there was no intergovernmental referral from one jurisdiction to the other.
2. Both jurisdictions have the case and North Dakota is responding to an intergovernmental request from some jurisdiction, which may include Three Affiliated Tribes.
3. Both jurisdictions have the case and North Dakota has initiated an intergovernmental request to some jurisdiction, which may include Three Affiliated Tribes.
4. North Dakota initiated a request to Three Affiliated Tribes, but the case is not open in the tribes' system.

Following each data match, both agencies reviewed the cases and made notes about their suggested resolution to any mismatches. They met to resolve any suggested resolutions that remained undecided. The small, shared caseload made the manual review manageable, even with the first report, which included 80 cases that were open in both agencies without a referral from one agency to the other.



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Over the course of the grant, mismatches fell in every category, and the agencies were able to close many cases after determining which agency was best suited to work the case.²¹ By the fourth match in January 2022:

- The number of cases requiring manual review decreased by 87%.
- The number of shared cases decreased by 76%.
- There were no longer any cases identified in which North Dakota showed an outgoing referral to Three Affiliated Tribes and Three Affiliated Tribes showed no open case.

Staff observations and lessons learned

Qualitative data was collected by sending a set of questions to the state's Tribal Unit Administrator and the case manager responsible for working with Three Affiliated Tribes for observations and lessons learned related to this intervention. The Director and the child support attorney of Three Affiliated Tribes also provided feedback.

North Dakota Child Support Tribal Unit staff assigned to the Three Affiliated Tribes caseload appreciated the specific procedures handbook that was developed to guide their casework with the tribe. They faced challenges when the tribe's staff did not seem to be following the agreed upon procedures but resolved them with meetings and phone calls.

The staff agreed that the enhanced procedures and the regular data matches should remain in effect after the grant. They would like to see the same procedures established with Standing Rock Child Support, with whom they share an even larger caseload.

Although the case managers did not think additions to the enhanced procedures handbook were needed because so many issues are case specific, policy thought there might still be opportunities to add to the handbook. Specifically, case managers often sought assistance from policy on questions of jurisdiction, multiple orders, and the assessment process between the Intake and Tribal units. Policy thought it might be appropriate to further enhance procedures to address those areas.

Policy also noted that staff might find "cheat sheets" or other abbreviated tools more useful and convenient than referring to the handbook for many questions.

²¹ Appendix, Intervention 4. See all lines.



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The Director and the child support attorney of TAT DCSE found the following grant initiatives the most important:

1. Having regular data matches (every six months).
2. Communication (email and phone calls).
3. Checking FACES when processing new cases.
4. Having the Three Affiliated Tribes and state procedure handbooks to fall back on and reviewing it from time to time.

“It was all forward motion on the project to improve our relationship and we think it was very successful.”
– Alison Johnson, Three Affiliated Tribes

The Director added that they hoped to continue the good work that has been started with the grant.

Intervention 5: Data Examination – Deep Dive

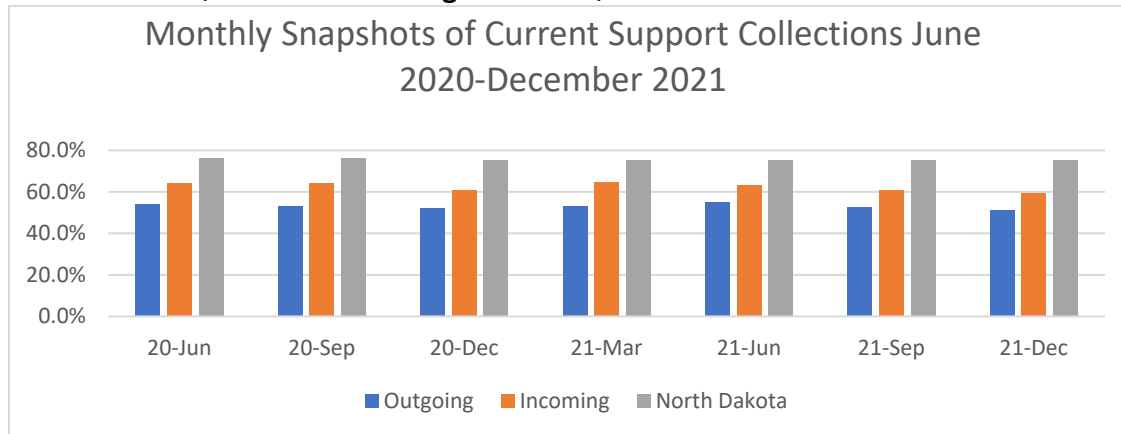
Table 5.1 displays a snapshot of July 2020 current support collections for each category of cases, current support due, and the percentage of current support collected calculated by dividing the total support collected for the jurisdictions identified by the current support due for the jurisdictions. The “Top 10” are the 10 states with the largest shared caseload with North Dakota. As depicted in the chart, there is a much lower percentage of current support collected in North Dakota’s outgoing interstate cases as compared to the overall percentage in all of its cases. North Dakota also collects a lower percentage of current support in its incoming interstate caseload as compared to the overall percentage in all of its cases. North Dakota observed this difference throughout the grant period, as seen in Chart 5.2 below.

Table 5.1: Current Support Collections – July 2020 Snapshot

Current Support Collections Results					
	ND All Cases	Outgoing Cases from ND to:		Incoming Cases to ND from:	
		Top 10	All Partners	Top 10	All Partners
Current Collected	\$7,016,244	\$291,698	\$484,649	\$351,537	\$530,795
Current Due	\$9,125,785	\$523,233	\$888,626	\$551,227	\$832,242
Percent of Current Collected	76.9%	55.7%	54.5%	63.8%	63.8%



Chart 5.2: Current Support Percentage for Outgoing, Incoming, and all North Dakota Cases from Second Quarter 2020 through Fourth Quarter 2021²²



The difference in performance by cases sent to other states (outgoing cases) inspired North Dakota to perform a close examination of casework. North Dakota selected samples of 24 outgoing establishment and 80 outgoing enforcement cases, proportioned as:

- 10 enforcement cases to each of the following states: California, South Dakota, Montana, and Texas
- 40 enforcement cases to Minnesota²³
- 3 establishment cases to each of the following states: California, Arizona, South Dakota, and Texas
- 12 establishment cases to Minnesota

The enforcement sample was drawn from and consists of cases which:

- Were initiated after October 1, 2017, and had an open outgoing intergovernmental referral as of November 1, 2019. These dates were selected because they pre-date the pandemic and provided a long enough period to supply an adequate number of cases.
- Had a collection of current support greater than zero but less than the responding state's overall FFY 2019 current support performance

²² While these averages show a slight downward trend during the grant period, it is not an indication of the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of the grant strategies. The effects of COVID-19, including a mass reassignment of staff from the office to home, significant unemployment across the country, stimulus checks, enhanced unemployment benefits, the "great resignation," the unavailability of courts, and many other factors had both positive and negative effects on collections in each state.

²³ Since more than one-third of North Dakota's outgoing interstate referrals are to Minnesota, a larger sample was selected from counties with a higher number of cases meeting the criteria: Hennepin, Clay, Polk, St. Louis, and Wadena.



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The establishment sample was drawn from and consists of cases which:

- Had an open outgoing referral for establishment of current support, including some cases that also required parentage establishment.
- The referral was sent between October 1, 2017, and May 31, 2019. These dates were selected because they pre-date the pandemic and provided a long enough period to supply an adequate number of cases, and a reasonable time to establish an order.
- The open outgoing referral remained open for at least six months, and the order establishment, if any, took longer than six months.

In addition, North Dakota asked Washington state to perform a similar examination of cases sent to them from North Dakota. Washington agreed and received a list of 45 cases referred from North Dakota. Washington asked three of their Management Analysts to review the case actions taken on the case and provide their observations about what actions either Washington or North Dakota staff might have taken to improve the response time and outcomes.

Deep Dive Results

Some of PK's observations from the deep dive were state specific and corroborated frustrations expressed by staff during the interviews and focus groups. Some states, for example, send the same CSENet message many times over several months. Some also send confusing CSENet messages asking for information already included in the information provided. Another state took many months to start working the case, then could not use the documents provided with the initial packet of intergovernmental forms because they were "expired."

For observations like these, the North Dakota CSS Director contacted the responding states' IV-D directors and discussed the issues, explaining how the deep dive verified North Dakota staff perceptions. The directors were able to work toward remedies. The responding state director in one example provided more specific direction to staff. In the "expired" documents example, the director is working with the state's attorney to try to resolve the problem.

In addition to the state-specific observations, the teams (both the North Dakota grant team and the Washington team) made some general observations applicable to intergovernmental cases with any state.

- Case managers did not always follow up with the other state after making a request for information or documents and a sufficient time had passed.
- Staff in North Dakota and other states relied on CSENet messaging, even for complex questions or after an earlier CSENet message went unanswered.

Washington analysts that reviewed the North Dakota cases made these specific observations:

- Debt calculations (ledgers) tend to lump everything together resulting in requests for clarification and slowing the process.



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- Noncustodial parents who are hard to collect from or hard to find result in cases getting bogged down or getting opened and closed repeatedly. The analysts saw this as typical for difficult case circumstances. They suggest that states not be so hasty in closing a case. While letting the case “percolate” may not result in collections, it will save time in referrals for both states.
- Increasing direct communication between the states will speed the resolution of issues that hold up getting the cases into “paying” status.

On both sides, though, I think a phone call between SEOs [case managers] rather than “CSENet-and-wait-and-clarify-and-wait” might have saved a lot of headaches.

-Washington state Management Analyst

Project Team Recommendations

Based on the observations, the project team made the following recommendations:

- Set an expectation for how often case managers should follow-up on outgoing cases.
- Encourage staff to use the phone or email, especially if:
 - The question or response is complex.
 - A CSENet communication has not received a response.
- Set a check-back date within a couple weeks to communicate (by an alternate method) if they receive no response, instead of sending the same message in the same manner. If necessary, escalate the lack of communication to a supervisor.
- Consider asking other states to perform a case review similar to the review done by Washington.
- Consider enhancing FACES system support in outgoing cases by providing increased notification functionality:
 - Create periodic delinquency alerts (e.g., every 60 days).
 - Notify the case manager if only partial payments (less than 90% of current support) are being received so contact with the responding state can be made.
 - If a payment, such as a federal tax intercept, is reversed, create a notification to the case manager so the other state can be notified and provided with an updated payment record.
 - Create alerts in outstanding review and adjustment cases so that status updates can be requested from responding states.

Additional Observations

1. Transfer of cases between states and tribes

If there is no debt owed to the state and no open assistance case, states may transfer a case to a tribe and close their state case by sending notification to the parent at their last known address and waiting a short period for an objection. If the parent does not object, the state may transfer the case. Federal regulation does not afford tribes the same opportunity. Instead, they



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must convince the parent that it is in their best interest to apply for the state's services, wait for the parent to submit that application, and then close the case. When states are better positioned to establish or collect than the tribe, the extra wait time to complete these steps has a negative effect on order establishment and enforcement.

2. Direct communication

Direct communication between case managers in different jurisdictions expedites casework. The exclusion of direct contact information in transmittals by states complicates the smooth and efficient completion of tasks necessary to the establishment and enforcement of a case in the responding state. Lack of communication frustrates case managers and delays the collection of support.

3. User-friendly forms

Difficult to understand and incomplete intergovernmental forms result in delays. While North Dakota now provides step-by-step tutorials in completing the General Testimony and the Declaration in Support of Establishing Parentage, the project team believes that a national investment in an on-line interview for the parent to complete, including electronic signature, would simplify and accelerate parents' correct completion of the forms.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

Lessons Learned

In addition to the lessons described in the interventions under Results and Analysis, the project provided several general takeaways for CSS and TAT DCSE staff that other jurisdictions may find useful.

- **Grant projects require significant time and effort.** Selecting an agency project manager or director to provide overall grant management is extremely important, especially when multiple jurisdictions are partnering on a project. It is also critical that an accurate workload approximation is made for all project team members, particularly if work on the grant project is voluntary or in addition to regular job duties. It may be helpful to reach out to agencies that have completed similar projects so that reasonable workload projections can be realized prior to drafting the grant proposal and budget.
- **Have open conversations with partners.** When partnering with another jurisdiction on a grant improvement project, it is helpful to establish collective goals and objectives prior to drafting the grant proposal. Likewise, it is important to recognize areas of disagreement or tension that may be refined through those shared goals.
- **Listen to staff and seek input.** Statewide staff assessments through group and individual interviews were central in determining what challenges were being faced in intergovernmental cases. Seeking out staff input through an Envision session and workgroups when planning for the Implementation phase and developing technical



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assistance documents gained staff buy-in and fashioned a feeling of staff ownership over the intervention activities, which contributed to the project's success.

- **Keep an open mind.** Although the project may have an overarching goal, be open to changes in direction and strategy as the project develops. This was especially important for this project, which was affected by the pandemic in nearly every way imaginable. When partnering with another jurisdiction, be open to learning new processes and methods to accomplishing similar tasks and respectful of different workplace cultures and dynamics.
- **Be open to change and constructive criticism.** This project provided the opportunity to look at our agencies internally as much, if not more, than looking at other jurisdictions' services of our intergovernmental cases. It was important to have project team members that had an open mindset and were ready to embrace change.
- **Data collection and organization is crucial.** A significant amount of time was spent during the Planning and Analysis phase developing the data collection strategy and monthly data reports. The project included data collection in various areas, including caseloads, support collections, customer service, and timeframes. Having a broader range of data was beneficial for purposes of evaluation due to the pandemic causing certain data – support collections – to be a less reliable indicator of the success of an intervention.

Next Steps

The project interventions have improved case processing within CSS and between CSS and TAT DCSE. Next steps will include:

- Refining the technical assistance documents, as needed, to address additional areas of concern identified during the Implementation phase, as further outlined in the interventions under Results and Analysis.
- Ensuring the refined and finalized technical assistance documents developed through the grant are issued to be used by staff post-grant on an ongoing basis, or incorporated into existing policy, as appropriate.
- Developing and implementing system enhancements, including automated notifications, to support interstate case management.
- Continuing to conduct semi-annual data matches between CSS and TAT DCSE and communicating openly and regularly about shared cases and intergovernmental issues.
- CSS intends to work with other tribal partners to implement an intervention similar to that completed with TAT DCSE.
- Continuing conversations with interstate professionals, including IV-D directors, in other jurisdictions to address interstate issues as they arise.



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Appendix – Intervention Data