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## Introduction

On September 25, 2019, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) awarded the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement a Child Support Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Demonstration Grant. The purpose of the demonstration grant was to test how child support agencies could improve intergovernmental case processing and collections. The Three-State Intergovernmental Project was the only one to focus on intergovernmental case processing between partner states. This project serves as a window into the federal IV-D program's intergovernmental caseload and an opportunity to illustrate the complexities of intergovernmental case processing and barriers to efficiency.

Although Virginia was the formal awardee, the project was a two-year collaborative initiative (plus an extension) in which Virginia, the Maryland Child Support Administration, and North Carolina Child Support Services participated equally.

The contractor for the project, Public Knowledge (PK), was tasked to deliver a systematic, objective assessment of child support operations in all three states that included capturing current business processes in each state's Central Registry and three field offices. Over a two-year period, PK conducted interviews and training, and developed several of the project interventions. PK also created several reports, including the "As-Is" Report.

The evaluation examined two overall questions:

- Did the interventions allow project offices to increase efficiency, resulting in improved current support collections, reduced number of median days between the date of referral and the date of order establishment, and enhanced customer service to families and to partner state intergovernmental child support professionals?
- Did the partner states experience similar gains even though they had different structures and case processing tools?

The project team<sup>1</sup> implemented five "back to basics" interventions in the twelve project offices of the three partner states (see Table 1). The operating hypothesis was that providing intergovernmental staff with resources, training, and tools would increase intergovernmental case processing efficiencies, thus increasing current child support collections, reducing the median number of days between the incoming referral and the date of order establishment, and enhancing overall customer service.

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<b>Virginia</b>	<b>Maryland</b>	<b>North Carolina</b>
Danville District Office	Baltimore City Office (run by Veritas HHS)	Mecklenburg County Office
Suffolk District Office	Prince George's County Office	Wake County Office
Northern Virginia Central Regional Office	Montgomery County Office	YoungWilliams Consortium of Eastern Counties (run by YoungWilliams)
Central Registry	Central Registry	Central Registry

Table 1. Project Offices

The project team evaluated data from six data elements and gathered additional qualitative data to show that Intergovernmental case processing improved, and customer service to the partner state agencies and parents improved as well.

## Background

### Grant Purpose

The demonstration grant project provided seven states and two tribal child support agencies with funding to improve their existing intergovernmental case processing procedures and systems. The child support agencies developed and tested innovations likely to increase payments on intergovernmental cases and implement procedures to increase their efficiency and customer service.

### Problem

Intergovernmental child support cases are much like their intrastate counterparts, yet they have extra layers of complication. According to the Notice of Funding Opportunity HHS-2019-ACF-OCSE-FD-1541 for this project, about one million intergovernmental cases are in the child support caseload. These cases accounted for around \$1.6 billion dollars in collections in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2020. When parents and children live in different states, tribes, or countries, serving these families can be challenging. Agencies working these cases often deal with the complexity of different laws, inadequate training or staffing, challenges getting information or communicating with other jurisdictions, and limitations of automated systems.<sup>2</sup> This project looked at three states to find solutions. The first and likely largest barrier to efficient intergovernmental casework is that although the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA) eased issues across state lines, the way states set up their child support agencies becomes a barrier. We chose three states (Maryland, North Carolina, and Virginia) because of how differently they are set up. The hope is that some of our findings can be recreated by our child support peers.

Maryland is a judicial state with a state-administered child support program. Maryland operates in 24 jurisdictions, with the five largest offices reporting directly to the Maryland Child Support

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<sup>2</sup> Child Support Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Demonstration HHS-2019-ACF-OCSE-FD-1541-  
[https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ocse/hhs-2019-acf-ocse-fd-1541\\_ig.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ocse/hhs-2019-acf-ocse-fd-1541_ig.pdf)

Administration: 18 offices report to the local Department of Social Services within each county; and one office, Baltimore City, is run by a private vendor responsible for two locations within the city limits.

North Carolina is primarily a judicial state with a state-supervised/county-administered child support program. North Carolina has 100 jurisdictions, 74 of which operate as a program within the county's Department of Social Services. Of the remaining 26 counties, 18 are run by a private vendor and eight are run by the county, but outside of the Department of Social Services.

Virginia is an administrative process state with a state-administered child support program that uses a centralized approach for initiating intergovernmental cases. Virginia has 16 district offices. Intergovernmental cases are initiated in 11 of these offices. In the remaining five district offices, intergovernmental cases are initiated through Central Region Operations. Responding cases are handled at the district office level throughout the Commonwealth.

Although none of the three states have moved to an electronic case file system, Virginia is the closest to doing so. They have developed a software system named "Perceptive" that can scan, index, and store intergovernmental case documents. Maryland and North Carolina do not have a comparable electronic document imaging system. Although they both can scan documents, they do not have a central depository that allows for universal sharing and storing of intergovernmental case documents.

All three states have access to the Child Support Enforcement Network (CSENET), but Maryland does not have an Electronic Documents Exchange (EDE). Virginia courts require electronic filing (e-filing) for specific pleadings and courts in Maryland and North Carolina do not use e-filing. Maryland and North Carolina require court documents to be filed on paper. All three states are participating in the Query Interstate Cases for Kids (QUICK), but North Carolina does not have the case activities module, but Maryland and Virginia participate in both the case activities and the financial modules.

The project offices were also chosen with the intent that the project would reach the widest range of office types. The factors in project office location selection were geography and administration type. The project team wanted to make sure the offices were physically close to the other two states and consider how the offices were administered. For example, Maryland included a privatized office, run by Veritas Health and Human Services and a conglomerate of offices in North Carolina were run by Young Williams, another private child support company.

We asked staff in these offices to help us define the specific problems we wanted to address with this project. These staff identified the two biggest problems in working intergovernmental cases as educational barriers (e.g., not understanding how intergovernmental cases work) and communication issues (e.g., not providing documentation in a timely manner).

Intergovernmental child support cases are also challenging because different laws and procedures apply. These cases require interaction between child support agencies, states and different legal systems. Variances that are challenging to agencies and courts are frustrating to parents. Also, the three states have a mix of factors that affect processes from state-administered to county-administered state programs, administrative versus judicial legal processes, and some private vendor program management of local offices.

## Interventions

### Goals

The goals of the intervention were to 1) increase the collection percentage of current child support due on cases in the project offices and the partner states; 2) decrease the median number of days between incoming intergovernmental referral and the establishment of a new order; 3) improve the customer service experience for parents on the intergovernmental caseload in the project offices, and 4) improve customer service to the child support professionals working the intergovernmental cases in the project offices.

Specific objectives were to:

- be available to other intergovernmental staff in the project office
- share direct contact information
- decrease the time needed to process an outgoing referral
- decrease the time between referral and the establishment of a new order
- reduce the number of calls from parents and with other intergovernmental staff

These interventions were focused heavily on increasing the knowledge of the frontline intergovernmental caseworkers in the project offices and increasing the communication between those workers. The emphasis on “back to basics” gave the staff in the project offices the attention and focus that may be low on the list of priorities in some state and local child support programs.

### Development

All interventions were developed through a collaborative process, beginning with a review of business processes by interviewing intergovernmental case workers in the project offices. We specifically wanted to know what concerns they had working with the partner states. The three partner states originally offered a joint proposal to engage in a three-state Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) study to document current processes for handling intergovernmental cases and to implement the most efficient and customer-centric processes going forward. While the project team attempted this action, the BPR component was removed after interviews with project office managers indicated there would be no reorganizing of the caseloads. For these reasons, and due to the large number of offices and the short duration of the project, the BPR method started, but there was no formal reengineering.<sup>3</sup> Based on the “As Is” Report, PK drafted a Recommendations Report of implementation ideas for the project team to consider. The intent of this report is to establish the baseline of all the data for the project. It collected a snapshot of what “is” in all three states and their respective project offices. Then the project team and key stakeholders in the partner states, including the frontline intergovernmental staff, held “Envision” sessions to strategically brainstorm and decide on new methods (interventions) for handling intergovernmental cases. The recommendations were the foundation (and the backup plan for discussion) for the frontline intergovernmental caseworkers’ discussions in the “Envision” brainstorming sessions.

We held multiple Envision sessions via Microsoft Teams over two days. On the first day, each state had its own session with their frontline intergovernmental staff and the project team. On the second day,

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<sup>3</sup> Public Knowledge interviewed staff, collected policies and procedures, and mapped out workflows in the project offices.

representatives from each state held an early session with mid-level managers in policy and systems in each state to review the ideas from the previous day's discussions. PK then hosted a later session for the project team and the three state IV-D Directors to make the final decision on the interventions, data measures, and next steps. While the project team attempted this goal, the BPR component was removed after the interviews with the project offices and feedback from their managers indicated there would be no reorganizing of the caseloads. Along with the large number of offices and the short duration of the project, the BPR method started, but there was no formal reengineering.

Because the project team values the collaboration with project office frontline staff, we wanted to keep a group of intergovernmental staff involved in planning the implementation interventions. As the plans for the interventions were drafted and honed, project team leadership worked with project offices to appoint two staff (one a frontline caseworker and one a manager) to serve on the Frontline Planning Committee (FPC).

The FPC reviewed documents and proposals associated with the interventions for clarity and usefulness. For example, for the first intervention, they were instructed to review the Pledge and apply a 3-part test:

- Did the activities in the Pledge make sense to the reader?
- Could the activities be done within a reasonable timeframe?
- Do frontline caseworkers complete the actions described in the Pledge?

The FPC did not help determine the data elements.

#### Description, target population, timeline

This project included five distinct interventions (see Table 2). They ran from January 1 through December 31, 2021, unless otherwise noted in the description.

<b>Pledge</b>	<b>3RG</b>	<b>Targeted Training</b>	<b>Intersect</b>	<b>Other Training</b>
Written document signed by project staff outlining how they will do business during the project period.	Three-State Reference Guide: - Contact list - Frequently Asked Questions - Training Links	Electronic Document Exchange (EDE)  Intergovernmental processes and best practices for OCSE tools	Monthly networking event with all project office staff	Intergovernmental process communications for custodial parents

Table 2. Project Interventions

## #1 The Project Office Pledge

### *Goals*

The goal of this intervention was to have a written Pledge for the target population of intergovernmental staff in project offices that would establish common competencies for the project. The Pledge was developed to help educate and train the project office intergovernmental staff on the interventions of the project and set expectations for their cooperation. It was not meant to provide requirements used for performance review by a caseworker's supervisor.

### *Description*

The Pledge is a three-page document that sets forth promises to work the intergovernmental cases to the best of the staff's ability. The Pledge was drafted in response to several case processing concerns expressed by intergovernmental staff in partner states. It aims to address recurring complaints about communication, timeliness, and other case management actions when dealing with other states.

The project team used Survey Monkey™ to disseminate the Pledge, to the intergovernmental workers on the contact list created for the project. The intergovernmental staff had the option to either agree or disagree that the action applied to their duties. Once executed, the Pledge was merged into a Word document for each signer and added their name and date of completion. The Pledges were sent to staff during the week of February 1, 2021. The Pledged activities lasted throughout the Implementation period. A copy of the pledge is located on page 25 of the Appendix.

## #2 The Three-State Reference Guide (3RG)

### *Goals*

Like OCSE's Intergovernmental Reference Guide (IRG), the 3RG provides information about intergovernmental case processing in both the partner states and the project offices. The goals of the 3RG are to:

- Serve as a resource for intergovernmental-related information so that contacting the intergovernmental caseworker in a different office is not required, thereby increasing case work efficiencies for the intergovernmental caseworkers in both offices.
- Increase efficiencies by educating staff about different ways the offices handle the intergovernmental case processing in their Jurisdictions.
- Help staff work referrals more efficiently by informing them in advance the information, documents, and time partner states and project offices need to complete certain case actions.
- Decrease the time it takes for financial support to reach the family
- Increase the ratio of child support collections
- Better inform to parents so they can manage their expectations of the case.

### *Description*

The 3RG has three subparts:

- 3RG-1: Project office and staff contact list, including the function and assignment of each intergovernmental person in each project office.
- 3RG-2: Answers from each project office to questions about state-specific case processing issues, including procedures and timelines. Also questions for each partner



state's central registry and project offices asking what they require for an incoming interstate referral, by function. Questions on OCSE's IRG are not restated on the 3RG, so intergovernmental staff are encouraged to use the IRG and the 3RG together.

- 3RG-3: Links to training materials on intergovernmental topics developed by OCSE and regional child support associations with materials on their organization's website.

Each subpart is in an Excel workbook document, each with multiple worksheets to organize the information from the partner states and project offices. As noted above, all intergovernmental staff in the project offices have access to the 3RG through the project webpage hosted by Virginia.

To protect the information in the 3RG from unintentional editing, the project team did not distribute the 3RG directly to intergovernmental staff in the project offices. Instead, a protected copy is available on the project webpage for staff to download.

### #3 Targeted Intergovernmental Training

#### *Goals*

The goals of this intervention were to educate the intergovernmental staff on the legal principles of UIFSA, increase the number of successful intergovernmental packets with correctly completed intergovernmental forms sent to the partner states, and increase the use of Electronic Document Exchange (EDE) in the Virginia and North Carolina project offices. During the assessment interviews with intergovernmental staff in the project offices, frontline workers requested more training to improve intergovernmental case processing and become—and work with—the “ideal” intergovernmental child support professional.

#### *Description*

The project team provided mandatory training for the intergovernmental staff in all project offices. Beginning in January 2021, the vendor trained intergovernmental staff in the project offices on the interventions, especially the Pledge and the 3RG. Subsequent intergovernmental training focused on laws, processes, and forms related to intergovernmental IV-D cases. Representatives of the project offices and OCSE presented this information. Project offices also received information about best practices for using OCSE tools such as QUICK, the IRG, and EDE. The training for all project offices was conducted via MS Teams.

The 3RG-3 training section identifies training offered by OCSE and child support associations with materials available on their organization's website that intergovernmental workers in the project offices can take at their own pace.

### #4 The Networking Events

#### *Goals*

The goal of this intervention was to provide regular networking and educational opportunities for intergovernmental workers in the project offices to increase knowledge and understanding of intergovernmental case processing in the other partner states and project offices and increase communication among intergovernmental workers.

#### *Description*

At the Envision session, caseworkers envision these events would be “like a mini-conference” with both networking and educational purposes. Based on that suggestion, the intervention was a series of events

called Intersects for all intergovernmental staff in the project offices and the project team members. The Intersect events were held monthly from January 2021 through June 2021. The final Intersect event was held on February 16, 2022, after the intervention was completed. The two-hour events were held via Microsoft Teams. Each event had a host from the project team. The meeting began with an icebreaker, followed by a learning segment and a discussion on best practices or real case scenarios. Each meeting highlighted an OCSE tool for intergovernmental cases and provided project and data updates.

The project team wanted to recognize excellence and celebrate and encourage performance improvement and better service to families, so they left time at the end of the events for accolades, or recognitions of intergovernmental child support professionals, nominated by their colleagues. Intergovernmental staff could nominate someone from another office for an accolade using a form accessible from the project webpage. The emphasis was on nominating someone outside the nominator's project office and preferably in another partner state.

## #5 Enhanced Customer Service

### *Goals*

The goal of this intervention was to develop a proactive process that would inform IV-D applicants about intergovernmental case processing and completing intergovernmental forms to improve customer service. Originally, the goal was to provide more assistance to custodial parents seeking to establish new orders with intergovernmental cases, but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented in-person contact.

### *Description*

The project team implemented the intervention to enhance customer assistance in two phases. The first phase was the development of the Custodial Parent Communication (CPC). Each project office used CPC to inform applicants with a new intergovernmental case or who needed to complete intergovernmental forms. The project developed the CPC using plain language to explain that the parent's case is an intergovernmental case, what that means, and that the same child support office would still help the custodial parent and work with the responding state. These efforts to enhance customer service to parents encompass principles of procedural justice, specifically respect, understanding, and helpfulness.

The CPC is a stand-alone document with office-specific contact information, but not case-specific information. Therefore, more preparation was not needed once the project office updated the document with their contact information. The Project Director added the CPC letters to the project webpage on January 5, 2021, for the project offices to retrieve and update with their preferred contact information.

The second phase was the development of a video PowerPoint presentation that educated parents on intergovernmental case processing. The vendor submitted a draft PowerPoint, which was sent to the FPC for review to see if it answered the questions that the custodial parents usually asked. The vendor designed it to provide general information that the partner states could tailor by adding state-specific content. Each partner state had state staff record narration to the PowerPoint video. Once each partner state finalized its narration, they posted the video on either their child support websites (Maryland and North Carolina) or their YouTube channel (Virginia). The intent was for parents to access the video independently.

The three states posted their videos at different times, based on the time the state took for its review process. As each state's video went live, the CPC was amended to add the link to the letter. Virginia

posted their video on July 9, 2021, and the effective date of their amended CPC was Monday, July 12, 2021.

The project measured the efficacy of these interventions through a quasi-experimental research design. The “treatment” groups that received the interventions were the project offices, while the “control” groups were non-project offices that did not receive the interventions. The baseline data included calendar years 2019 and 2020, while the implementation period was calendar year 2021. All interventions launched in January and February of 2021 for the project offices. Trainings, intersects, and networking events were provided from January through June of 2021, with a final training and intersect event in February of 2022, outside of the recorded period. Implementation data was recorded monthly in calendar year 2021.

### Outcome Measures

The outcome measures for the project consisted of six data elements and their interactions with each of the three partner states. Data Elements 1 and 2 are current child support collections ratios and current child support collections ratios with each partner state, respectively. The current collections ratio is calculated by dividing the total current child support paid on the caseload in that month by current child support due on the caseload in that month. For example, if the caseload had \$2 million due that month and only \$1 million was paid, the current collection ratio would be 50 percent. Therefore, an increase in percentages indicates more support was collected.

Data Elements 3 and 4 are the timeframes from referral to order establishment for statewide populations and between partner states, respectively. Two specific parts of this measurement require more explanation. First, the project team decided these data elements would be retrospective. Due to the relatively short implementation period, the project would likely not have enough time for new referrals sent during the implementation period to result in entry of a support order. The process from referral to support order entry can take several months. The caseworkers must rely on the partner state to establish the support order in a timely matter and then forward it on to the initiating state. Each month, the cases with a new order entered are selected, and then the data expert counts backwards to the date the referral was accepted to calculate the number of days between the date the referral was accepted and the date of the order. This method gives the project more orders to count in each month of the implementation period. Second, the project team used the median number of days between the acceptance of an incoming referral and the date the support order was entered. Due to extreme variation of minimum and maximum days, the average was not an accurate measurement for project performance. The data experts<sup>4</sup> recommended the use of the median number of days, as it better represents the central tendency when compared to the average.

Data Element 5 includes the result of staff surveys conducted in September 2020 and in January 2022. The survey focused on customer service levels to custodial and noncustodial parents and to other child support agencies. Most questions in the survey used Likert scales with additional open-ended questions to let staff provide additional feedback. Participating intergovernmental staff in all offices of the partner states completed the baseline survey, and only project office staff complete the post-implementation survey. Topics in the survey were:

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<sup>4</sup> Three data analysts, one from each state assisted with the collection and reporting of data from their respective states.

- Customer interactions, general and complaints
- Agency interactions, general and repeated requests for information
- Approximate number of requests by the Central Registry for missing or corrected documentation in an incoming intergovernmental referral
- Approximate number of referrals rejected by the Central Registry before sending a referral to the field office
- Approximate number of cases closed for the customer's non-cooperation for failure to complete the intergovernmental forms
- Approximate use of EDE
- Satisfaction with the ability to reach intergovernmental caseworkers in each Partner State.

Data Element 6 is the number of EDE<sup>5</sup> transactions between the two partner states with access (Virginia and North Carolina). EDE is a method of securely delivering documents electronically to other states who also participate in the child support program. Within this data element is additional data that breaks down the count of unsolicited and solicited documents sent and received by each project population. The solicited documents are those sent in response to the other state's request. The unsolicited documents are sent to the other state without that other state's request. Common examples of unsolicited documents include new referrals and new orders entered by the responding state and sent to the initiating state. This data element was added to the project design in late 2020. Due to technical limitations of the EDE reporting tool, only 90 days of past data can be collected. Therefore, the baseline data can give only a partial comparison to the EDE data. The information gathered monthly since August 2020 gives the whole picture of both sent and received documents. OCSE liaisons provided 12 months of pre-implementation data on the number of unsolicited documents only sent by Virginia and North Carolina for analysis.

All data was submitted monthly, unless otherwise noted, by the project team's data experts. Virginia's data expert created a template to ensure uniform data submission.

### Research Questions

During the formal approval of the project's program model, two primary research questions were drafted as guideposts with which the team could orient their overall data collection and analysis. These research questions are:

1. Did the interventions allow project offices to increase efficiencies with respect to intergovernmental (IG) case processing (collections ratio and number of days between referral and order)?
2. Did the partner states experience similar gains?

As each intervention may intersect with one or both of these questions at different times throughout the lifecycle of the project, the project team drafted six secondary research questions that cover related components ancillary to the primary research questions. These questions are:

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/training-technical-assistance/overview-electronic-document-exchange-edc>

1. Was there reduced number of days between referral and order?
2. Was there an increase in the collections ratio of Current Child Support (CSUP)?
3. Was there improved communication in project offices with the parents on each case?
4. Was there improved communication between the project offices in each partner state?
5. Was there improved statewide performance on OCSE 157 measures?
6. Was there an increase in the overall use for EDE, QUICK, and Child Support Enforcement Network (CSENet)?

When the program model and project plan were being developed, the intention of leadership at the Virginia Division of Child Support was to develop and deliver a customer service survey separate from this project to all customers. The expectation was that the project team could then use that data and possibly narrow it down to parents affected by this project. Due to COVID-19, the plan for the customer survey has been delayed to a future date, and therefore, information for Question 3 will be limited for this report.

In addition, OCSE 157 measures were not available for all partner states when this evaluation report was compiled. OCSE issued Dear Colleague Letter [DCL-21-06](#) on August 9, 2021, stating that due to new criteria being adopted for the annual 157 report, states submitted revised reports for FY2020 data by December 31, 2021. Thus, no annual reports to Congress which had trend analysis for OCSE 157 measures were available for FY2020 and FY2021 during the spring of 2022. Question 5 was removed and is no longer represented in the Results or Analysis subsections.

Last, due to restraints in reporting systems, the only intergovernmental transfer system able to participate in data collection for this project was EDE, so we revised Question 6 to drop the reference to QUICK and CSENet, as seen in the Results and Analysis subsections.

## Results

### Sample Size

As with any multi-year study involving front-line or field staff, turnover and staff mobility throughout the project period affected the overall sample size directly engaged with the staff-centric interventions. The baseline survey sent to all intergovernmental staff in the partner states' project offices during the fall of 2020 indicates 200 staff participants in field positions, with 15 staff in Central Registries. However, by the end of 2020, the number of intergovernmental staff who participated in the 3RG (Intervention #2) shifted to 125 field positions and 19 staff in Central Registries. The project team believes the number of participants in the 3RG is most representative of the true numbers of the treatment group sample size.

Like the staff-focused interventions, the number of intergovernmental cases potentially affected by these interventions was also subject to change throughout the project period. Project office caseloads declined throughout the implementation period, except for North Carolina's Initiating caseload. The caseloads referenced below are both Initiating and Responding. Initiating refers to cases that the state sends to another state to work and responding cases are ones received from the other state to work on their behalf. Beginning and ending population numbers are provided for reference in Table 3.

State	January 2021	December 2021	% Change
Virginia (Initiating)	7,193	4,375	-39.18
Virginia (Responding)	3,794	2,392	-36.95
Maryland (Initiating)	6,769	6,295	-7.00
Maryland (Responding)	6,611	6,343	-4.10
North Carolina (Initiating)	2,823	3,452	22.28
North Carolina (Responding)	3,564	2,660	-25.36

Table 3. Number of Cases for Project Offices by State

### Statistical Analysis

The project team used a difference-in-difference method for data collection and analysis. This method is a quasi-experimental approach that compares the changes in outcomes over time between a population enrolled in a program (the treatment group) and a population not enrolled (the comparison group). The project offices and non-project offices serve as the treatment and comparison groups respectively, while the two years of baseline data collection is intended to mitigate time-based threats to validity. The unit of analysis is monthly outcomes for each specific office type, including project office and non-project offices of each state's initiating and responding caseloads. This should have resulted in 24 baseline observations (two years) and 12 implementation period observations (one year) per population of interest (project office, and non-project office) for 72 observations for each of the 12 target population (statewide initiating, responding, and partner state-specific initiating-responding caseloads) analyses. However, as noted in the tables and results below, there were several instances of no transactions between target states during months in the study, leading to reductions in observations for specific target populations. The project team also excluded reported median averages that included timelines longer than five years (1,825 days) to focus results on cases largely active during the project period. Multiple linear regression was used to test if whether the office was a project office and whether the office was receiving interventions (implementation period) positively affected observed performance.

### Results

#### COVID-19 Impact

As mentioned, COVID-19 likely affected every part of this project. When this evaluation was drafted, the project team did not have enough information about the pandemic to account for the specifics of its impact. Likely, the largest challenge resulted from the lockdowns. Because staff were not physically in their offices, there were delays in receiving and responding to mail. In addition, North Carolina and Maryland rely on their states' court systems to establish orders, but court closures were likely to have led to more delays. The pandemic serves as a historic threat to the validity of our research design, and it may take significant time and analysis in the coming years to identify how observations related to caseloads, interactions, and ratios of current support collections were changed through disruption to all parts of business models. One positive effect of the pandemic was the speed at which all staff had to enhance or embrace digital communication, whether using electronic tools like EDE or online meeting platforms.

## Secondary Research Questions

The guiding questions for the project serve as headings to organize the results below. Each question includes a summary of the related data trends throughout the project, followed by project-wide highlights. Please refer to the Appendix for a complete presentation of figures that display project data organized by independent state performance.

We performed a regression analysis in which the dependent variable was the monthly average current collections ratio or the average median number of days between support order and establishment. Dichotomous variables were used to represent the independent variables of interest. The first dichotomous variable was a value equal to 1 if the observation occurred during the implementation period and 0 if the observation occurred during the baseline period. The second dichotomous variable was equal to 1 if the observation was performed by a project office and 0 if it was performed by a non-project office. The last dichotomous variable was 1 if the observation was performed by a project office and was during the implementation period and 0 if the observation did not fit both of those categories simultaneously. Specific attention is paid to the third independent variable to provide the best estimate for evaluating the success of the project's intervention strategies. As noted by Virginia's Office of Research and Planning, the overall results seem to indicate insignificant positive effects of the project implementation, but they also suggest there were minimal negative effects especially given the circumstances of the study period. Ultimately, the low  $R^2$  values may indicate there were many external factors affecting the two outcome measures as well.

It bears repeating that several observations were not considered in the calculation of median days due to the lack of interaction between the Partner States or due to the exclusion of cases with uncommonly long processing days (5 years or more), thus potentially limiting the power of the significance test in some cases.

### *Was there reduced number of days between referral and order?*

All states saw an increase in median days for their overall initiating caseload for the cumulative performance of project offices. Maryland had the largest cumulative project office increase in median days, raising their average by 210.90 days. Maryland's statewide initiating caseload, including project and non-project offices, saw the largest increase of 195.75 days in their average median ( $p = 0.000$ ). However, the  $R^2$  for Maryland's statewide initiating caseload regression was 0.390, indicating the possibility that less than 40 percent of the proportion of variance could be attributed to the explanatory variables. Maryland also recorded only 44 out of the 72 planned observations for their initiating caseload with North Carolina due to several months of no case activity and several cases over the 5-year cutoff needing to be excluded. This undoubtedly affects partner state's  $R^2$  values and p-values. Table 4 presents the initiating caseload changes in averages.

State/Office	Avg Reported Median		Change
	Baseline Period October 2018 to December 2020	Implementation January 2021 to December 2021	
VA - Statewide	176.23	321.88	145.65
VA - All PO	195.37	322.67	127.30
VA - All NPO	175.23	335.13	159.90
VA - PO (MD)	63.08	48.91	-14.17
VA - NPO (MD)	238.29	517.10	278.81
VA - PO (NC)	305.64	502.57	196.93
VA - NPO (NC)	170.85	251.68	80.83
MD - Statewide	554.79	750.54	195.75
MD - All PO	678.23	889.13	210.90
MD - All NPO	480.71	602.50	121.79
MD - PO (VA)	545.07	744.22	199.16
MD - NPO (VA)	366.83	766.20	399.37
MD - PO (NC)	762.00	868.50	106.50
MD - NPO (NC)	652.32	634.50	-17.82
NC - Statewide	197.10	281.04	83.94
NC - All PO	228.02	420.17	192.15
NC - All NPO	191.71	245.63	53.92
NC - PO (VA)	256.59	337.85	81.26
NC - NPO (VA)	147.70	178.29	30.60
NC - PO (MD)	370.85	322.33	-48.51
NC - NPO (MD)	249.15	649.79	400.64

Table 4. Change in Average Median Number of Days Between Order and Establishment during Baseline and Implementation for Initiating Caseloads. Improvements are highlighted in green.

While the main trend was an increase in the average of median days between referral and order during the project period, some offices did experience reductions, with North Carolina showing the largest reduction. North Carolina saw a reduction in their overall responding caseload, the largest being a 27 percent decrease in median days for the project offices, which is visualized in Figure 1.



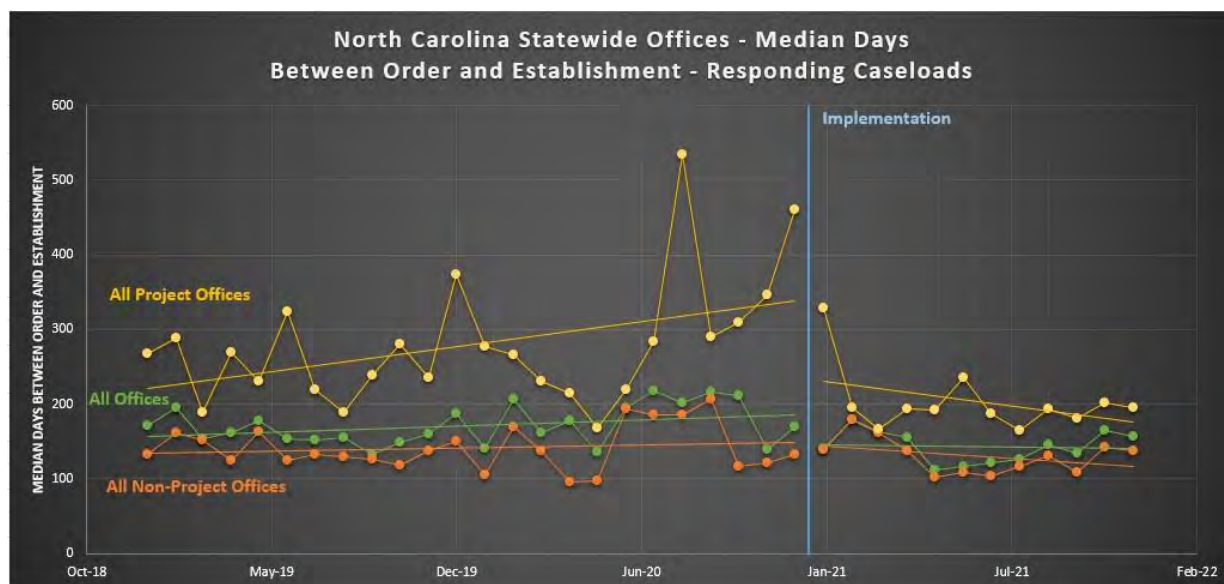


Figure 1. North Carolina Statewide Offices: Median Days Between Order and Establishment – Responding Caseloads. Trend lines have been added for emphasis.

Of note, while the regression analysis of North Carolina’s statewide observations indicated a statistically significant likelihood that being a project office during the implementation period was associated with a 65-day decrease in median days ( $p = 0.022$ ,  $R^2 = 0.579$ ), there was lower statistical significance in state-specific interactions ( $p = 0.623$  for cases originating in Maryland and  $p=0.100$  for cases originating in Virginia) and poor model fit ( $R^2 = 0.058$  for Maryland and  $R^2 = 0.227$  for Virginia), indicating there may be other factors outside of the interventions that could have played a role in this desirable outcome. Also, a decreased number of interactions due to months of inactivity and cases beyond the 5-year cutoff between North Carolina and Maryland ( $N = 52$ ) may also be a contributing factor to the high  $p$ -value and low  $R^2$  value. Further trends in responding caseloads are noted in Table 5.

Virginia’s average reported median appeared to increase, with regression analysis bolstering the observed improved performance for cases originating in Maryland that went to project offices during the implementation period. However, the  $p$ -value for that observation ( $p = 0.435$ ) and the  $R^2$  values for statewide (0.135), cases originating in Maryland, (0.022), and cases originating in North Carolina (0.047) are strong indicators for skepticism that the interventions directly correlated with the performance increase or decrease. For consideration, Virginia recorded lower than the target of 72 observations when looking at partner state-specific interactions, with Maryland only recording 59 observations and North Carolina only recording 64 observations due to similar months of inactivity and cases excluded from the five-year cutoff.

Maryland’s statewide responding data revealed some statistically significant findings ( $p = 0.050$ ) that the interventions resulted in a smaller increase in median days (135.88), when compared with the probability that being in a non-project office resulted in an increase of 183.13 days ( $p = 0.000$ ). Considering the statewide data included no months of inactivity or cases excluded from the five-year cutoff, this finding contrasts with the lower  $R^2$  values and higher  $p$ -values for partner state interactions that indicate a low probability of impact from the interventions.

State/Office	Avg Reported Median		Change
	Baseline Period October 2018 to December 2020	Implementation Period (January 2021 to December 2021)	
VA - Statewide	215.56	272.08	56.52
VA - All PO	277.90	427.83	149.93
VA - All NPO	210.17	266.92	56.75
VA - PO (MD)	265.53	248.08	-17.45
VA - NPO (MD)	224.15	280.17	56.02
VA - PO (NC)	382.93	444.31	61.38
VA - NPO (NC)	267.35	309.00	41.65
MD - Statewide	299.77	414.96	115.19
MD - All PO	427.52	569.71	142.19
MD - All NPO	244.42	250.71	6.29
MD - PO (VA)	490.76	607.83	117.07
MD - NPO (VA)	340.10	441.00	100.90
MD - PO (NC)	438.21	624.91	186.70
MD - NPO (NC)	213.67	324.67	111.00
NC - Statewide	171.77	143.04	-28.73
NC - All PO	279.50	203.04	-76.46
NC - All NPO	141.60	130.58	-11.02
NC - PO (VA)	291.15	162.82	-128.33
NC - NPO (VA)	147.52	130.08	-17.44
NC - PO (MD)	316.43	297.57	-18.86
NC - NPO (MD)	207.10	245.95	38.85

Table 5. Change in Average Median Number of Days Between Order and Establishment during Baseline and Implementation for Responding Caseloads.<sup>6</sup> Improvements are highlighted in green.

#### *Was there an increase in the collections ratio of CSUP?*

When assessing both initiating and responding caseloads, the overall trend was mixed between decreased and increased collections during the project period. Due to the nature of CSUP data because it is a constant touchpoint on active cases, all states reported all 72 observations for their analyses. This lets us rule out a decreased number of observations as a contributing factor to low R<sup>2</sup> values and high p-values.

North Carolina and Maryland's statewide starting caseload saw an increase in the average reported CSUP collected. However, these reported increases are harder to prove as directly attributed to the interventions. Maryland's statewide regression analysis yielded R<sup>2</sup> values that indicated poor model fit (0.045) and a small negative correlation to increased collections ratio for project offices during the implementation period that was not statistically significant (p = 0.274). Examining North Carolina's interactions with Maryland shows a statistically significant (p = 0.000) probability that project offices

<sup>6</sup> States in parentheses indicate case population represented in that line of statistics.

during the implementation period could experience an expected increase in CSUP by 0.054%, yet roughly 24% of the variance in the model ( $R^2 = 0.240$ ) can be explained by our target variables.

Virginia's analysis of their initiating caseload yielded similar trends of poor model fit and high p-values, indicating the low likelihood that the performance noted in Table 6 are correlated with the project's interventions. One statistically significant ( $p = 0.002$ ) was found to indicate a negative correlation (0.039%) with project offices during the implantation period and their CSUP ratios. However, an  $R^2$  value of 0.239 puts a hold on generalizing any large takeaways for that population. Table 6 focuses on the reported average of CSUP collected for the starting caseload and the percent changes between baseline and implementation periods.

State/Office	Avg Reported CSUP Collected		Change
	Baseline	Implementation	
VA - Statewide	53.51%	53.15%	-0.36%
VA - All PO	53.87%	53.64%	-0.23%
VA - All NPO	53.44%	53.06%	-0.38%
VA - PO (MD)	56.64%	54.81%	-1.84%
VA - NPO (MD)	57.38%	55.61%	-1.77%
VA - PO (NC)	55.24%	53.51%	-1.73%
VA - NPO (NC)	52.09%	54.23%	2.14%
MD - Statewide	58.77%	59.28%	0.51%
MD - All PO	59.28%	59.11%	-0.17%
MD - All NPO	58.40%	59.39%	1.00%
MD - PO (VA)	61.18%	60.16%	-1.03%
MD - NPO (VA)	58.35%	57.11%	-1.24%
MD - PO (NC)	52.54%	53.30%	0.76%
MD - NPO (NC)	54.18%	56.34%	2.17%
NC - Statewide	56.76%	56.94%	0.18%
NC - All PO	58.79%	59.99%	1.19%
NC - All NPO	56.25%	56.11%	-0.14%
NC - PO (VA)	59.34%	57.72%	-1.62%
NC - NPO (VA)	57.97%	56.97%	-1.00%
NC - PO (MD)	63.14%	67.62%	4.48%
NC - NPO (MD)	64.19%	63.66%	-0.53%

Table 6. Percent Change of Average Reported CSUP Collected during Baseline and Implementation for Initiating Caseloads. Desirable results are highlighted in green.

The general trend in regression analysis for the responding caseload was much higher  $R^2$  values when compared with the rest of the analyses, but also much higher p-values, indicating that while the model explains a larger part of the variance, it's not insightful due to the low statistical significance. One statistically significant result ( $p = 0.037$ ) was North Carolina's interaction with Virginia, indicating that project offices during the implementation period were generally correlated with a 0.021% increase in CSUP collections. While not the highest of this population's analyses, the  $R^2$  value of 0.440 for this

observation builds on the present evidence of some improvement of North Carolina's performance potentially attributed to the project's interventions.

While Maryland recorded some of the highest  $R^2$  values for this population analysis, their p-values were also equally some of the highest, leading our team to assume the low probability that the corresponding coefficients could be extrapolated to a predictive or interpretive formula with any confidence. Virginia's analysis is unique for this caseload because they recorded some of the lowest  $R^2$  values and highest p-values, further indicating a lack of correlation between interventions and most state performance during the project period. Table 7 notes the reported averages during the baseline and implementation periods and their change observed at the end of the project.

State/Office	Avg Reported CSUP Collected		Change
	Baseline Period October 2018 to December 2020	Implementation January 2021 to December 2021	
VA - Statewide	59.52%	58.48%	-1.03%
VA - All PO	59.73%	59.14%	-0.59%
VA - All NPO	59.47%	58.33%	-1.14%
VA - PO (MD)	58.07%	57.25%	-0.82%
VA - NPO (MD)	58.07%	57.83%	-0.24%
VA - PO (NC)	59.74%	58.17%	-1.57%
VA - NPO (NC)	58.73%	56.75%	-1.98%
MD - Statewide	65.15%	60.62%	-4.53%
MD - All PO	62.70%	58.52%	-4.18%
MD - All NPO	67.78%	62.82%	-4.96%
MD - PO (VA)	60.93%	56.59%	-4.34%
MD - NPO (VA)	66.88%	61.89%	-4.99%
MD - PO (NC)	62.95%	58.22%	-4.74%
MD - NPO (NC)	71.78%	67.04%	-4.73%
NC - Statewide	60.72%	60.35%	-0.37%
NC - All PO	57.63%	57.11%	-0.52%
NC - All NPO	61.71%	61.41%	-0.30%
NC - PO (VA)	58.01%	60.59%	2.59%
NC - NPO (VA)	61.59%	62.09%	0.50%
NC - PO (MD)	53.33%	55.50%	2.17%
NC - NPO (MD)	58.69%	63.36%	4.67%

Table 7. Percent Change of Average Reported CSUP Collected during Baseline and Implementation for Responding Caseloads. Desirable results are highlighted in green.

*Was there improved communication in project offices with the parents on each case?*

The first phase of this intervention included the Custodial Parent Communication (CPC) Letter. The manual nature of this document made it difficult to track receipt. The Project Director requested that

the state project managers gather the number of letters sent out each month. This information is being reported for complete the Implementation period. North Carolina sent out 205 letters; Virginia sent 311; and Maryland reported that 12 were sent out but the project team assumes based on comparable caseload sizes with the other two states they sent out at least as many as North Carolina.

The second phase of this intervention has more information available. Both North Carolina and Virginia succeeded in posting the intergovernmental video to their website or YouTube channel during the project period. Reporting information available from YouTube reflects that the videos were viewed by quite a few customers— North Carolina’s video received 842 views and Virginia’s video received 217 views. When the project ended, Maryland was still working through internal approval processes to have their video posted. We cannot prove if this directly improved communication, but it means about 1000 people consumed new information about intergovernmental cases.

#### *Was there improved communication between Project Offices in partner states?*

The primary representation for this measure was the responses by field and central registry staff on the topics of communication between project office staff in the survey (Data Element 5). This survey was offered to all project office staff at the beginning and end of the intervention period. Examples of questions include those that relate to spending time on the phone, waiting for documentation or more information, the volume of telephone or email contact, or time spent on office duties dealing with documentation. It also bears mentioning this measure is subject to the perception of the caseworkers because these are self-reported totals in the survey platform. No caseworker tracking was started for this project. Last, any noteworthy change in self-reported satisfaction with the ability to reach caseworkers in partner states also applies to this question. In addition, baseline results reported in the following tables do not reflect the designation between workers in the field and central registry staff, as less than 1 percent of respondents indicated they had a central registry role. The post-intervention survey was only offered to individuals who had completed the pre-intervention survey.

Largely, the results of the survey revealed that most workers in the field reported that factors such as: *response time between agencies, electronic document transmission and utilization, and contact between case workers using direct contact* stayed the same. Table 8 indicates at least 25 percent of field respondents reported they felt that response time improved and roughly 8.33 percent felt that response time had gotten worse. At least 25 percent of respondents also indicated CSENet messages with case workers in project offices have gotten “better/faster;” over 2.7 percent believe it has gotten “worse/slower.” Twenty-five percent of respondents reported they felt that contact had increased with case workers in the project offices using direct contact information, while 8.33 percent reported feeling they’d had less contact since last taking the baseline survey. In comparison, Central Registry respondents were more positive, with 45.45 percent indicating a perceived improvement in response time, 54.55 percent indicating no change, and 0 percent indicating they felt that response time had gotten worse. As for time spent on the phone, 41.6 percent of workers in the field reported that they spent the same time waiting on hold for call centers, while 22.2 percent of field respondents reported that they felt they spent more time on hold for call centers since they last took the survey. Table 9 focuses on the responses from the Central Registry participants.

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Improved More Contact Less Wait Time</b>	<b>Gotten worse Less Contact More Wait Time</b>	<b>Stayed the same</b>	<b>Not Applicable</b>
Do you think your response time with case workers in the project offices has improved, gotten worse, or stayed the same since you last took the survey? (N = 36)	25.00%	8.33%	55.56%	11.11%
Do you think you have had more, about the same, or less contact with case workers using direct contact information since you last took the survey? (N = 36)	25.00%	8.33%	50.00%	16.67%
Does it feel like you have waited on hold for call centers less often, more often, or about the same than when you last took the survey? (N = 36)	16.67%	22.22%	41.67%	19.44%

Table 8. Field Survey Response Percentages on Improvement of Communications

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Improved More Contact Less Wait Time</b>	<b>Gotten worse Less Contact More Wait Time</b>	<b>Stayed the same</b>
Do you think your response time with case workers in the project offices has improved, gotten worse, or stayed the same since you last took the survey? (N = 11)	45.45%	0.00%	54.55%
Do you think you have had more, about the same, or less contact with case workers using direct contact information since you last took the survey? (N = 10)	25.00%	8.33%	50.00%
Does it feel like you have waited on hold for call centers less often, more often, or about the same than when you last took the survey? (N = 10)	40.00%	0.00%	60.00%

Table 9. Central Registry Response Percentages on Improvement of Communications

When comparing the baseline survey results to the second survey delivered during the implementation period, baseline survey results typically skewed to extreme sides of the spectrum. The self-reported number of calls or emails received from custodial or non-custodial parents during an average week trended down, with the biggest reductions in the 16-24 times per week (29 percent in the first survey to 11 percent in the second) and 25+ times per week (45 percent in the first survey to 25 percent in the second) categories, as seen in Figure 2.

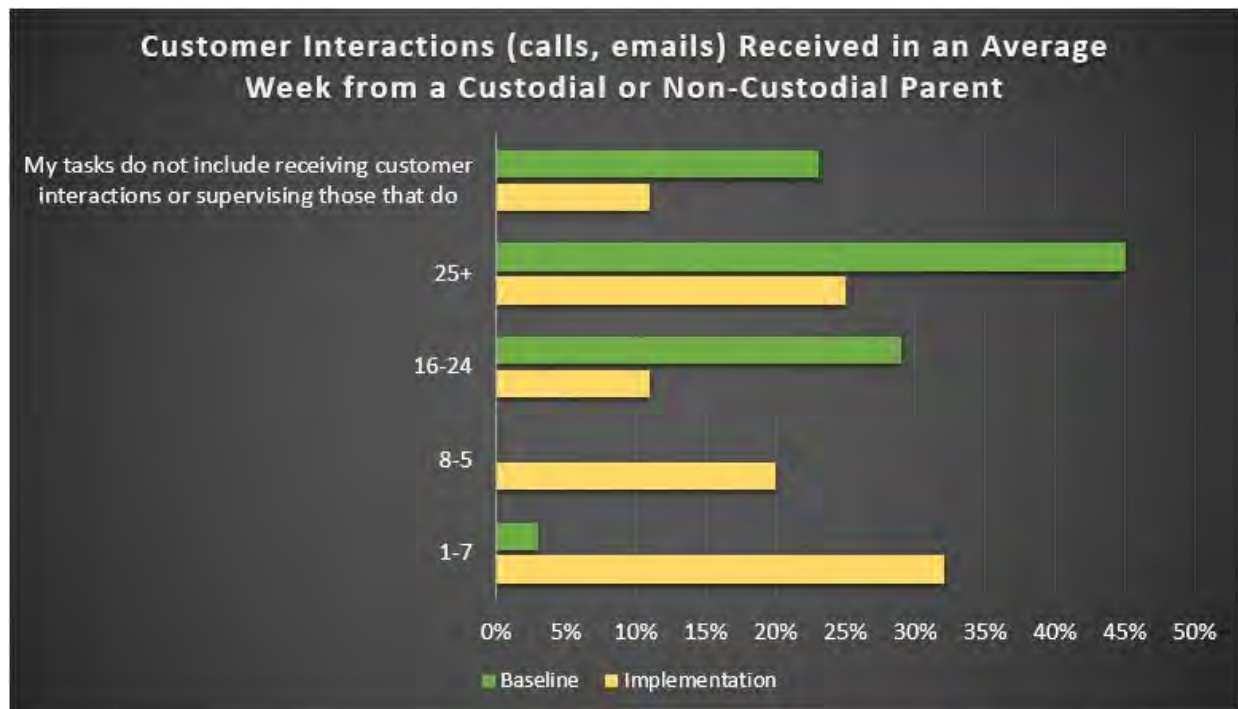


Figure 2. Customer Interactions Received in an Average Week from a Custodial or Noncustodial Parent

However, within that reduction of contact, an increase in inquiries surrounding case status was noted for all categories except for 0-2 times per week and 15+ times per week, as highlighted in Figure 3.

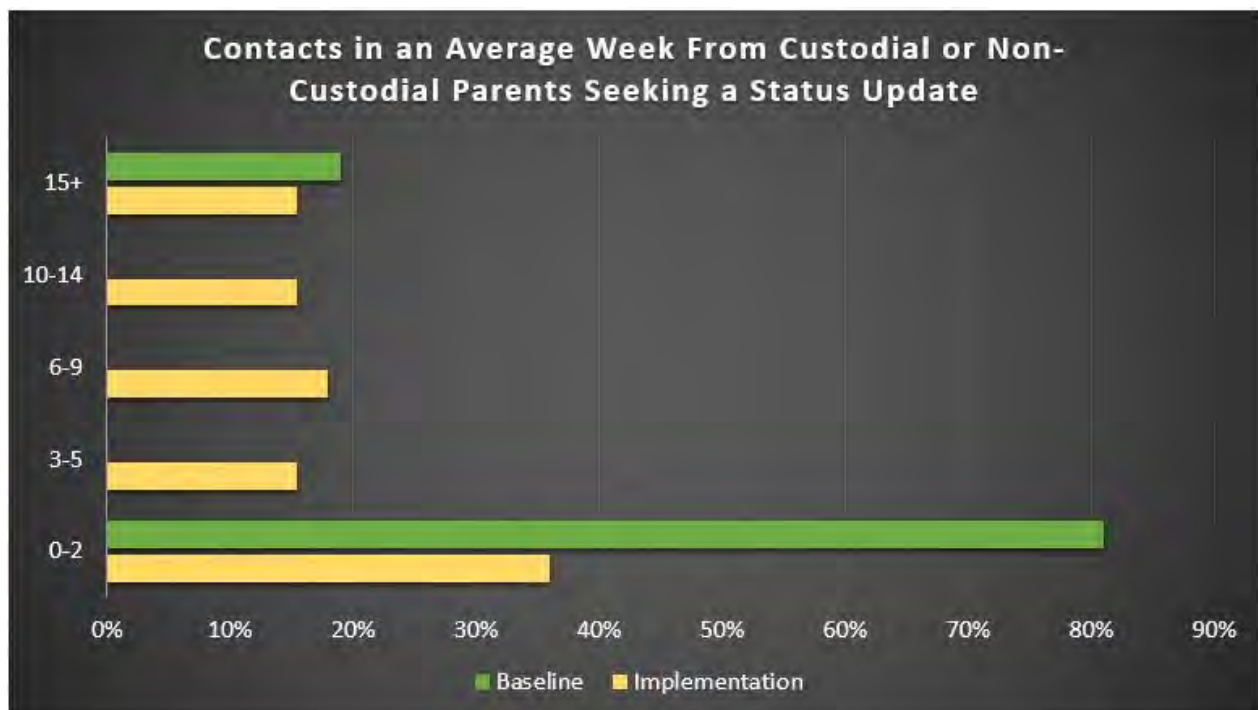


Figure 3. Contacts in an Average Week from Custodial or Noncustodial Parents Seeking a Status Update



Similarly, a reduction in self-reported calls made by caseworkers to other partner state agency contacts to voice a complaint regarding an intergovernmental case was recorded in both the 0-1 time per week and 8+ times per week categories, while an increase was recorded in the 2-4 times per week and 5-7 times per week categories (Figure 4). Overall, respondents indicated there was no change in the number of calls they placed to voice a complaint.

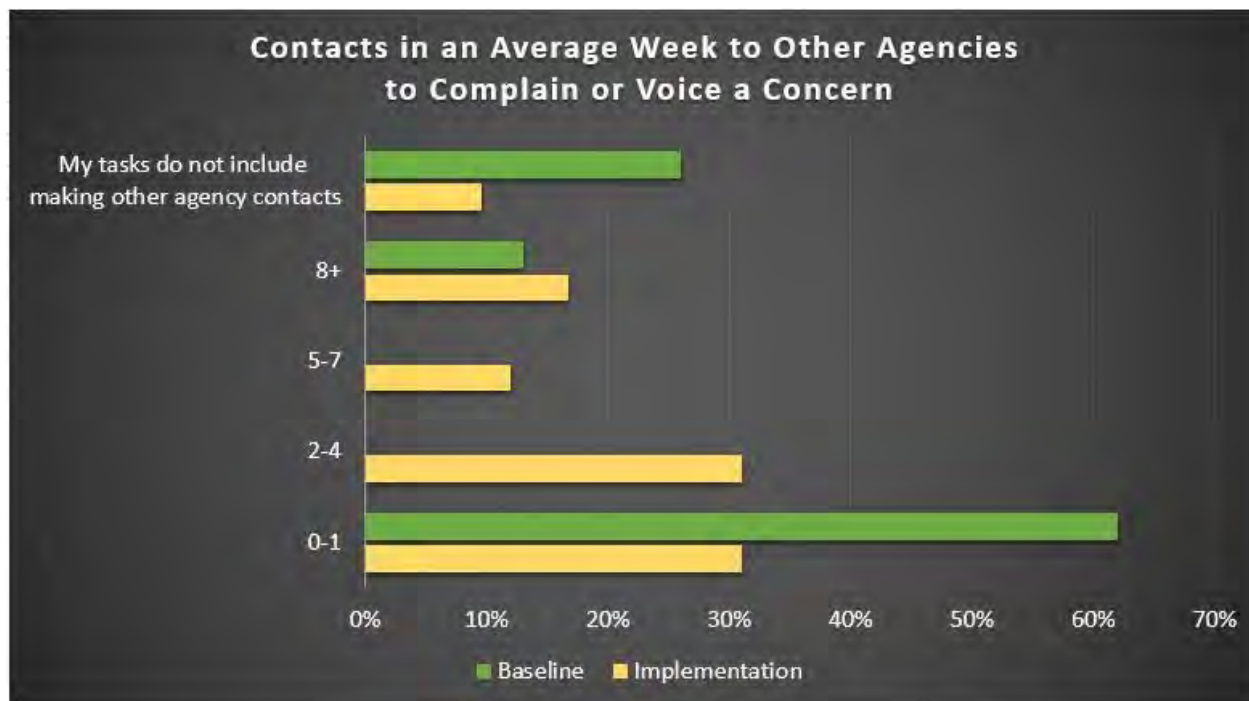


Figure 4. Contacts in an Average Week to Other Agencies to Complain or Voice a Concern

When looking at the number of self-reported contacts received from partner states, the majority (81 percent) indicated no major shift in the average month number of contacts among participants, with the next highest part indicating they felt as though there had been fewer contacts on an intergovernmental case (12 percent). Table 10 shows how this trend continues with the majority of the respondents indicating that the number of requests and complains remained about the same.

Question	More Contacts More Requests More Complaints	Less Contacts Less Requests Less Complaints	About the same
Comparing number of contacts received in an average week from another agency on an intergovernmental case. (N = 33)	6.06%	12.12%	81.82%
How many agency contacts involved a request for a status update because they requested more documents or information and had not received it? (N = 36)	8.33%	13.89%	77.78%
How many contacts involved the other agency having a complaint or concern? (N = 35)	5.71%	11.43%	82.86%

Table 10. Field Survey Response Percentages on Agency Requests and Complaints



Due to the small sample size that participated in the post-implementation survey, it is difficult to extract any large trends regarding field staff satisfaction and their ability to reach case workers in their partner states. Tables 11 and 12 detail the percentages recorded regarding satisfaction. It is worth highlighting there was not a significant shift in either direction for the partner states.

Question	Yes	No
Overall, are you satisfied with your current ability to reach case workers in North Carolina? (N = 549)	77.41%	22.59%
Overall, are you satisfied with your current ability to reach case workers in Maryland? (N = 549)	57.19%	42.81%
Overall, are you satisfied with your current ability to reach case workers in Virginia? (N = 450)	83.09%	20.67%

Table 11. Pre-implementation Field Survey Response Percentages on Satisfaction of Ability to Contact Partner States

Question	Yes	No	No contact with caseworkers in state
Overall, are you satisfied with your current ability to reach case workers in North Carolina? (N = 36)	72.22%	11.11%	16.67%
Overall, are you satisfied with your current ability to reach case workers in Maryland? (N = 36)	47.22%	36.11%	16.67%
Overall, are you satisfied with your current ability to reach case workers in Virginia? (N = 36)	63.89%	16.67%	19.44%

Table 12. Post-implementation Field Survey Response Percentages on Satisfaction of Ability to Contact Partner States

#### *Was there an increase in the overall use for EDE?*

As noted, the only baseline data available is “unsolicited” documents sent through EDE for the 2020 calendar year. Due to the technicalities of reporting in OCSE’s EDE system tool, no usable baseline data could be gathered for the “solicited” documents, or for any period beyond November of 2020. In addition, while these percentage changes seem to be large, they are not abnormal in the context of numbers recorded for EDE. For example, in the calendar year of 2020, North Carolina sent 8.67 unsolicited documents per month through EDE. In 2021, North Carolina increased their average unsolicited document send rate to 38.92 per month, indicating a 348.90 percent increase in the average number of unsolicited documents sent.

As shown in Table 13, Virginia and North Carolina had been steadily trending upward in their overall usage of EDE. Calculations for this table include the average number unsolicited documents sent through EDE per month in both the baseline and implementation period, with the percent change between those two values represented in the table. North Carolina’s reported numbers deserve mention, as they showed a triple-digit increase in usage of EDE in each of the measured populations. In Virginia, not only were these effects visible in the project offices, but there was a statewide increase by

115.15 percent in EDE usage overall, even reversing an earlier downward trend identified in the baseline period of the non-project offices sending to North Carolina case population. Virginia project offices recorded an average increase of 75.80 percent in unsolicited documents sent via EDE month-to-month, while North Carolina reported an average increase of 420 percent in the number of total EDE documents sent by project offices, outperforming North Carolina's non-project offices in the same category. While our team wants to attribute these increases in EDE use to the project alone, the general trend of EDE use had been on the rise overall. That Virginia's non-project offices experienced over double the gains seen by the state's project offices indicates less of a possibility that the interventions by themselves contributed to the increase in EDE use.

State/Office	Avg. Percent Change
VA - Statewide	115.15%
VA - All PO	75.80%
VA - All NPO	167.74%
VA - PO (NC)	-7.38%
VA - NPO (NC)	22.82%
NC - Statewide	349.04%
NC - ALL PO	420.00%
NC - All NPO	417.07%
NC - PO (VA)	284.62%
NC - NPO (VA)	253.85%

Table 13. Average Percent Change from Baseline to Implementation Periods for Reported Unsolicited Documents Sent via EDE

### Primary Research Questions

*Did the interventions allow project offices to increase efficiencies with respect to IG case processing (collections ratio and number of days between referral and order)?*

Intra-state performance presented complex results when trying to separate the impact of the interventions used by the project offices and the general state trends that affected all cases regardless of research population. In addition, regression analysis revealed the inability to attribute performance in either direction to the project's interventions alone. Therefore, the first criteria, collections ratio, indicates that for Virginia and Maryland, at least one to two project offices increased their performance when compared to the non-project offices, but the general trend was more mixed. While Virginia's non-project offices seemed to indicate smaller decreases in collection ratios, Maryland was nearly split down the middle between project office and non-project office indicating stronger performance, as seen in Table 14. Unfortunately, without having a wider range of statistically significant results for comparison, it's inadvisable to argue that interventions were responsible for the recorded performance. North

Carolina also recorded mixed performance improvements, with half of their project offices recording the more desirable outcome.

State/Office	Avg Reported CSUP Collected		% Change
	Baseline	Implementation	
I - VA - PO (MD)	56.64%	54.81%	-1.84%
I - VA - NPO (MD)	57.38%	55.61%	-1.77%
R - VA - PO (MD)	58.07%	57.25%	-0.82%
R - VA - NPO (MD)	58.07%	57.83%	-0.24%
I - VA - PO (NC)	55.24%	53.51%	-1.73%
I - VA - NPO (NC)	52.09%	54.23%	2.14%
R - VA - PO (NC)	59.74%	58.17%	-1.57%
R - VA - NPO (NC)	58.73%	56.75%	-1.98%
I - MD - PO (VA)	61.18%	60.16%	-1.03%
I - MD - NPO (VA)	58.35%	57.11%	-1.24%
R - MD - PO (VA)	60.93%	56.59%	-4.34%
R - MD - NPO (VA)	66.88%	61.89%	-4.99%
I - MD - PO (NC)	52.54%	53.30%	0.76%
I - MD - NPO (NC)	54.18%	56.34%	2.17%
R - MD - PO (NC)	62.95%	58.22%	-4.74%
R - MD - NPO (NC)	71.78%	67.04%	-4.73%
I - NC - PO (VA)	59.34%	57.72%	-1.62%
I - NC - NPO (VA)	57.97%	56.97%	-1.00%
R - NC - PO (VA)	58.01%	60.59%	2.59%
R - NC - NPO (VA)	61.59%	62.09%	0.50%
I - NC - PO (MD)	63.14%	67.62%	4.48%
I - NC - NPO (MD)	64.19%	63.66%	-0.53%
R - NC - PO (MD)	53.33%	55.50%	2.17%
R - NC - NPO (MD)	58.69%	63.36%	4.67%

Table 14. Percent Change of Average Reported CSUP Collected for Initiating (I) and Responding (R) Caseloads During Baseline and Implementation. Desirable results are highlighted in green.

The second criteria, days between referral and order establishment, presents a different trend for Virginia. As show in Table 15, Virginia's project office performance outperforms the non-project offices in both the initiating and responding caseloads interactions for Maryland and are mixed regarding their improvement rate for the responding caseload with North Carolina. Maryland's project offices frequently outperformed their own non-project offices, with the only exception being the initiating caseload with North Carolina. North Carolina's project offices were largely successful in outperforming their non-project office counterparts, with the initiating caseload with Virginia being the only exception, as highlighted in Table 10. Of note is this particular data had the lowest amount of statistical significance, indicating the degree of difficulty in asserting the interventions affected the change in average median number of days between order and establishment.

Change in Average Median Number of Days Between Order and Establishment for Initiating (I) and Responding (R) Caseloads During Baseline and Implementation			
State/Office	Avg Reported Median Days		Change
	Baseline	Implementation	
I - VA - PO (MD)	189.25	269.00	79.75
I - VA - NPO (MD)	238.29	517.10	278.81
R - VA - PO (MD)	265.53	248.08	-17.45
R - VA - NPO (MD)	224.15	280.17	56.02
I - VA - PO (NC)	305.64	502.57	196.93
I - VA - NPO (NC)	170.85	251.68	80.83
R - VA - PO (NC)	382.93	444.31	61.38
R - VA - NPO (NC)	267.35	309.00	41.65
I - MD - PO (VA)	545.07	744.22	199.15
I - MD - NPO (VA)	366.83	766.20	399.37
R - MD - PO (VA)	490.76	607.83	117.07
R - MD - NPO (VA)	340.10	441.00	100.90
I - MD - PO (NC)	762.00	868.50	106.50
I - MD - NPO (NC)	652.32	634.50	-17.82
R - MD - PO (NC)	438.21	624.91	186.70
R - MD - NPO (NC)	213.67	324.67	111.00
I - NC - PO (VA)	256.59	337.85	81.26
I - NC - NPO (VA)	147.70	178.29	30.59
R - NC - PO (VA)	291.15	162.82	-128.33
R - NC - NPO (VA)	147.52	130.08	-17.44
I - NC - PO (MD)	370.85	322.33	-48.52
I - NC - NPO (MD)	249.15	649.79	400.64
R - NC - PO (MD)	316.43	297.57	-18.86
R - NC - NPO (MD)	207.10	245.95	38.85

Table 15. Change in Average Median Number of Days Between Order and Establishment for Initiating (I) and Responding (R) Caseloads During Baseline and Implementation. Desirable results are highlighted in green.

While each state presents varying improvements, the general trend indicates that project offices outperformed their in-state peers, which could be due to the interventions.

#### *Did the partner states experience similar gains?*

As is shown by the intra-state performance analysis in the prior research question, partner states did not experience similar gains. While North Carolina experienced improvements in nearly every category, and Virginia's project offices recorded improvements with timelines, Maryland's improvements were much narrower and often only in specific instances. Of note is both Maryland and Virginia experienced statewide decreases in interstate collections and increases in median days between referral and order

establishment. Potentially, this indicates that the state-specific context may hold more influence over the success of these interventions as opposed to the interventions functioning independently or influencing the statewide trends. North Carolina's improvement in their project offices compared to their state average adds more weight to the consideration of individual state context when evaluating the most effective interventions. This thread is explored in the next subsection.

## Secondary Research Questions

### *Was there reduced number of days between referral and order?*

It was not a surprise to the Project Team that the most notable gains would be seen primarily in the responding caseload. This caseload allows the state to exercise more control in how the interventions are applied throughout the life cycle of the intergovernmental case. However, these results indicate the importance of communication between initiating and responding caseworkers, noting that the fewest increases in performance were present in initiating cases through the project period. This is highlighted in situations where, for example, one state sends an incomplete UIFSA packet. If there is not a good working relationship and/or open lines of communication, the responding state might decline the packet and return it to the initiating state. If the lines of communication are open and a good working relationship exists, the responding state would pick up the phone or use one of many online tools to request the missing information. In doing so, the timeline of the median days between referral and order establishment would be consequentially reduced.

Of note is the relatively small number of intergovernmental cases processed between the Partner States during the study period. Uneven numbers of reported case interactions among the Partner States lead to averages that are difficult to describe as "representative." This part of the inter-state interactions was an additional contributing factor to the project team's decision to exclude median days between order and establishment reported over 1,875 days (or 5 years). By excluding these outliers, the project team intends to focus its observations and analysis on cases most affected during the project period.

Each of the project's interventions contribute to the impact of this measure and are subject to statewide trends that influence timeframes for order establishment, despite experimental procedures. Results for this measure must be taken in context of these general trends and weighed appropriately in the scale and duration of the project. While it first may seem that the project was unsuccessful in reducing the average of median days between referral and order, an extended implementation period may provide a more accurate picture by helping to mitigate the expanded threats to internal validity posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *Was there an increase in the collections ratio of CSUP?*

While the overall trend may have been a decrease in the collections ratio during the implementation period, both Maryland's initiating and North Carolina's overall success are worth a closer look. Maryland's success could be partially attributed to a "spillover" effect from increased collections in North Carolina. The gain in Maryland's statewide initiating caseload collections could be attributed partially to the increase in North Carolina interactions, as seen in the increase in both project and non-project office collections in Table 3. While this does not diminish the impact of the interventions on Maryland, it reiterates the overall impact and resonance with these interventions regarding North Carolina's intergovernmental caseworkers.

To some degree, “spillover” effects were expected, or at least hoped for, in terms of the totality of each intervention. Because the nature of intergovernmental casework is inherently complex and affected by a network of factors, the project team hoped that at least one or several interventions would have enough of an impact to increase the overall performance of the target population on the designated metrics.

An additional year would allow us to provide more contextual analysis to the larger trends in support collection. While it may be tempting to conclude the interventions are ineffective in increasing support on intergovernmental cases overall, the strong response by North Carolina prevents any universal notions of causality. Specifically, with North Carolina’s largest gains in the project offices, the 3RG and Targeted Training interventions may have had the best contextual fit with the needs of the state’s intergovernmental workers to improve their collection efforts.

During the exit interviews held with all state project managers, it was determined that North Carolina had several other things occurring that may have affected the results. The first was that being a judicial state, the caseworkers had to rethink how they enforced cases when all the courts closed. In the past, they relied almost completely on the courts to hand down enforcement actions. The other two factors, which could cause more indirect effects, are the way the state office communicated with the field offices. They intentionally stopped referencing performance measures in all communications and instead focused on how they could best support the frontline staff. Last, like the other two states, North Carolina is continuing system modernization, which included asking staff which may have caused staff to approach casework differently than before.

#### *Was there improved communication between POs in Partner States?*

Initial review of the trends in survey responses seemed to emphasize that most respondents felt there hadn’t been much of a change in either direction regarding communication between the partner states. It’s important to note the shortcomings of this metric in that self-reported perceptions without individual tracking of email or phone response times will not produce a detailed perspective of the true impact of these interventions. In the context of the work environment, caseworkers have already undergone a lot of change in the past several years and may not have been able to adequately register a difference in contact about intergovernmental cases during the shift to remote work, remote dockets, etc. In addition, while it may not seem like a success, any avoidance of a decrease in satisfaction regarding communication is worth celebrating in the tumultuous peaks and valleys of the ongoing pandemic.

However, the quarter of respondents who indicated increased communication between partner states suggest a level of efficacy that may be more apparent with a larger sample size. More follow-up with intergovernmental caseworkers and staff over the coming years should yield more insight into the long-term efficacy of this part of the project.

The exit interviews with both project office staff and state project managers reflected that communication had improved. So, although the surveys did not necessarily clearly reflect communication improvement, the participants’ perception was that it did. We believe that staff involved in the project will be more likely to contact other states when they have a question or need help.

### *Was there an increase in the overall use for EDE?*

This metric serves as another prime example of the unimagined impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on this project. Due to North Carolina's spike in EDE usage in the spring of 2020 at the onset of statewide lockdowns, the baseline data for North Carolina is an example of internal validity being compromised by historical, outside events. If we exclude North Carolina's baseline data, we still see positive trends in the implementation period through regular, monthly increases in unsolicited documents being sent via EDE. A subsequent analysis could include data from two years before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in 2020, as that would give a more accurate representation of North Carolina's baseline usage before the shift to remote-focused casework. A question the Project Team cannot answer is whether this trend is still the fallout of the ongoing resurgence of various COVID variants, prompting waves of closures and re-openings of state offices, thus increasing the sustained use of EDE throughout the implementation period. In addition, cultural factors at play in North Carolina may also contribute to a higher-than-average EDE usage. As a state child support program, their advocacy for EDE use was notable and long-standing before the project period. North Carolina has also offered training to their workers outside of the intervention specifically focused on EDE. Like the baseline data, a longer period of data collection beyond the implementation period would reveal if this is a permanent shift toward EDE usage for the state of North Carolina.

Focusing on Virginia, a similar trend of positive EDE usage is present between the baseline and implementation period. These data also highlight a reversal in the non-project office caseload population working with North Carolina specifically, changing a two-year negative trend in EDE usage to a year-long positive trend. The data from this project may suggest the additional interventions served as a tipping point for more widespread use across North Carolina intergovernmental caseloads. In addition, the successful increase in the overall use for EDE suggests the efficacy of targeted training for intergovernmental case processing tools regarding both states.

### **Primary Research Questions**

#### *Did the interventions allow Project Offices to increase efficiencies with respect to intergovernmental case processing (collections ratio and number of days between referral and order)?*

The Project Team feels confident that for some metrics, the interventions may have contributed to increased performance in project offices when compared to non-project offices. This is most evident in the median number of days between order and establishment. A quick review of Table 10 highlights that the majority of improvements occurred exclusively within the project offices. This observation contributes to the assertion that within other state-wide trends that may occur, there is strong evidence that the interventions allowed project offices to outperform in-state peers.

More insight gleaned from exit interviews also indicates which intervention had the strongest potential for impact. The theme that ran through the project and the exit interviews was the need for more communication. This was raised in both the 3RG (access to contact information) and the Intersect events. These perspectives are bolstered by the results in the field and Central Registry survey, where although most respondents indicated there wasn't a remarkable shift in the way individuals experienced their intergovernmental caseload, the second-highest number of responses indicated improvements to their overall work processes. It is also worth repeating that maintaining stability in an era of unprecedented change to the working world and to the world of child support indicates the interventions may have been more effective when there wasn't a global pandemic.



#### *Did the Partner States Experience similar gains?*

As noted, the individual local factors that influence processing procedures in each state can consequentially affect the efficacy of interventions' implementations. The urgency for North Carolina to pivot to new methods of enforcement beyond the courts may have created the prime environment for intergovernmental caseworkers to embrace new strategies presented by the interventions. The ability to contact other partner state caseworkers directly may also have benefited North Carolina, because their caseworkers had to build new relationships to manage paternity and order establishment that before had relied on the judicial timeline. Ultimately, these contextual factors served as an advantage for North Carolina, and perhaps a disadvantage for Maryland and Virginia.

#### *Additional Points of Analysis*

##### *How might individual differences in state administrative structures impact these results?*

One way that the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to impact the interventions and the subsequent data collection is through the different ways administrative environments and structures responded to the crisis. Virginia is an administrative process state. The shift to remote work allowed enforcement remedies to remain largely the same, using enforcement tools and remedies in the same order and at the same rate as before the lockdown.

In contrast, Maryland and North Carolina are both judicial process states. With the inability to conduct court proceedings in person, and due to possible delays caused by the installation of and/or training on remote court access technology, both partner states were at a disadvantage in moving from referral to order establishment in what may be considered an "average" length of time.

##### *How might caseload differences in each state impact these results?*

All states have more intergovernmental cases in non-project offices. Due to this imbalance, Virginia and North Carolina would need greater performance improvements to increase the state's overall current support collections ratios. This highlights improvement displayed by North Carolina in that their project offices contributed to an increase in overall collections for their statewide initiating caseload, while in the other partner states this metric trended downward

Nearly every caseload in each state experienced an overall decrease during the baseline period of 2019 and 2020, before entering the implementation period. This trend continued, and, in some instances, was magnified during the implementation period. Maryland exited the baseline period with a 2.47 percent increase in their state's numbers for the initiating caseload, and a decrease of only 7.78 percent for their responding caseload. However, by the end of the implementation period, the initiating caseload had declined by 16.78 percent and the responding caseload had declined 10.90 percent, as shown in Figure 5.



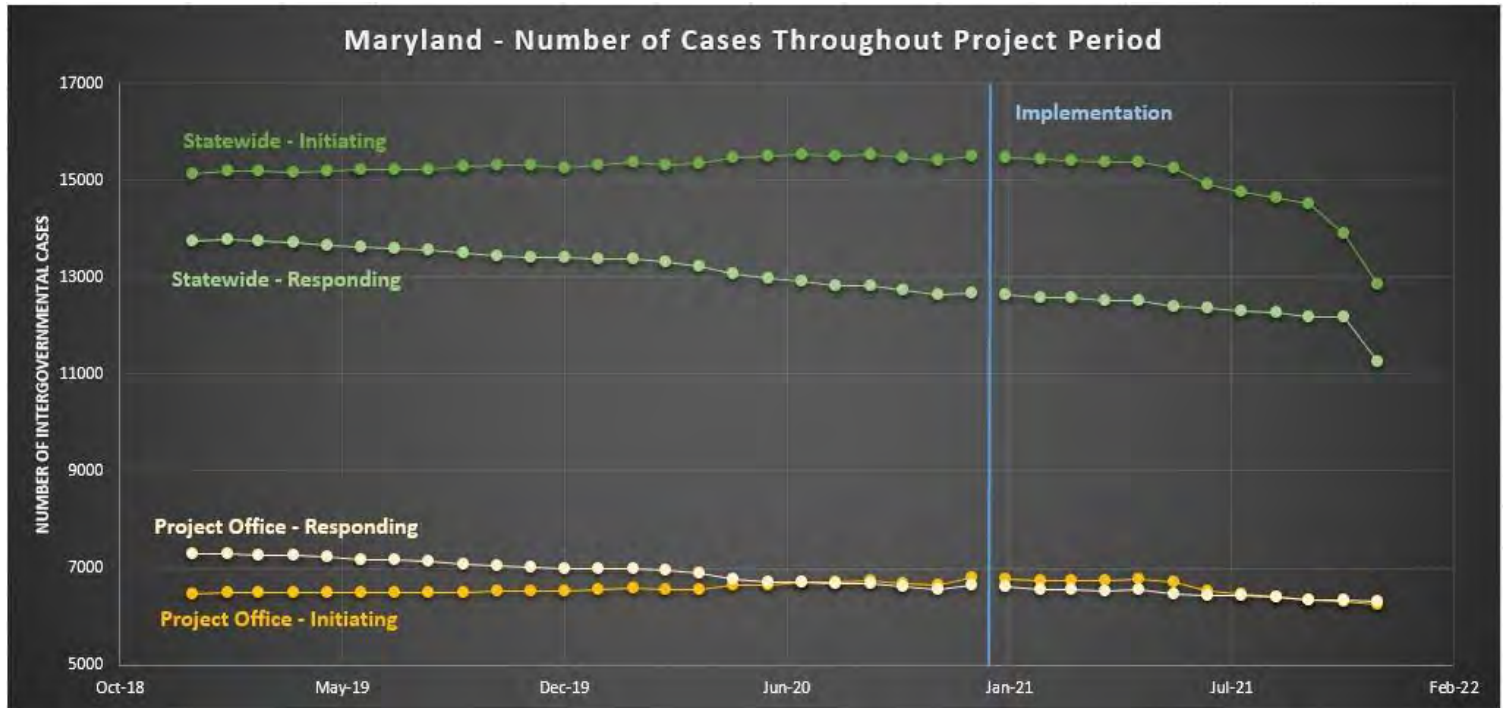


Figure 5. Number of Cases Throughout the Project Period in Maryland

A reduction in caseload has the potential to impact the data through its effect on the sample size. A consistent reduction in cases means a smaller sample size for impact measurement. As noted earlier (in the analysis of the change in median number of days between order and establishment), a smaller sample size has the potential to distort the median by providing too few cases that would form a representative sample.

## Lessons Learned and Next Steps

First, carrying out this project during a substantial shift in case processing and management due to the COVID-19 pandemic could have made a big impact on the outcomes. Second, the uncertain times could have also resulted in the lack of “model fidelity,” which described the extent to which interventions follow the same process as intended. That is, to measure how well intervention worked, minimal deviation from the process is critical across all project office sites. The public health emergency could have made it difficult for all project offices to follow the same protocols designed pre-Pandemic, leading to less desirable or inconclusive outcomes.

Relatedly, because the grant team and the project offices experienced a sudden shift in the way work is performed, this project may have provided important insights on how to create interventions or improve current practices with these scenarios in mind. Project offices may also have better ideas on how to implement changes in different settings (e.g., case processing performed primarily online vs. in person).

Overall, we think it’s important to highlight some gains that could have happened through the grant that weren’t anticipated, such as a higher CSUP collection rate and lower median processing days.

## What worked?

The project had many successes. It increased education about intergovernmental cases and tools to work those cases. This is reflected in increase in EDE usage for the states that have access. From the exit interviews, there was a case for intergovernmental-specific caseloads to allow staff to develop expertise and also establish relationships. Communication increased, as reflected in use of the 3RG tools and participation in the Intersect events by the project office staff. It was also observable in the number of CPC letters sent out and views of the intergovernmental videos posted by all three states.

## What didn't work?

The attempt to apply BPR processes failed for several reasons. The first was due to how different processes are across state lines and the budget of the project was not sufficient to make this reengineering work in all three states. Second was a simple bandwidth issue with staff due to COVID-19 closures and changes in internal offices processes. In some respects, COVID-19 was the business process reengineering as it caused staff to change the way they handled their work and it was unrealistic to attempt two major changes at one time. The reengineering that COVID caused was that all three states took all of their staff from working in offices and seeing customers face-to-face and overnight sent everyone home, while trying to figure out how to keep the payments to families flowing. Most of the staff assigned to this project are people that make things happen at their respective organizations and were also tapped to help with pivots associated with office closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another thing that prevented progress is the inability of staff to make decisions. Each state sent a delegation of staff to participate in the project. At times it seemed that the staff at planning and implementation meetings did not actually have the “power” to make decisions about how the project would and could be carried out at their organization.

The three state directors decided decision to participate in this project without discussing what that meant to the staff who were ultimately assigned to it. This could have been navigated more smoothly had the project director made more decisions before bringing staff to the group provided more detail in explaining expectations upfront.

Another factor was that the details of the project were not final and the vendor contract was not signed when the application was submitted. A lot of time was spent attempting finalize project details during the contract award period and then again as things shifted due to COVID-19. For future projects, the Division of Child Support Enforcement will likely look specifically for agile partners in future contractors, someone with the flexibility to adjust or pivot quickly since we do not always have the ability to do that ourselves as a government entity.

## Replicability

There are parts of this project that can be recreated by our child support peers. The 3RG could be established by states independently or states could join existing organizations such as the National Child Support Communication Forum<sup>7</sup> or use the existing tools provided by OCSE such as EDE and the new Communication Center.<sup>8</sup> Due to expanded knowledge acquired during office closures due to the

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<sup>7</sup> Organized by Kenosha County Child Support. <https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/borderproject/index.php>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/employers/child-support-portal/communication-center>

pandemic, the Intersect events could be easily and inexpensively reprised with any online meeting platform. The pledge is already being used by both the Eastern Regional Interstate Child Support Organization (ERICSA) and Western Intergovernmental Child Support Engagement Council (WICSEC) during their annual conferences and Intergovernmental Fair. The other part of the project that can be replicated with little or no budget is staff training. Much of what the project office staff were encouraged to use are available on OCSE's website or the various child support professional organizations. We found there are also in-state resources available that are often overlooked.

### Sustainability

In its current format, most of our project will not be supported with more funds. During the project period there was a dedicated project team and several staff members to maintain the resources and keep up with project staff. There has been a request for the 3RG to be maintained and this is being considered by leadership and perhaps by Central Registry supervisors.

However, we plan to continue some of the technology enhancements recommended by the vendor in the early phases of the grant. The project director has passed responsibility of this task to the Intergovernmental and Financial Response Manager during the closeout process. She has also been involved in the project from the beginning and may choose to maintain some or all of the other parts of the project. The Virginia team will continue to make themselves available to help with any recommendations and future implementation. The project team did not have enough resources (money or time) to complete the informational video and planned enhancements. That is another part that could be continued by possibly the internal training team or an outside vendor if funds allow.

Finally, the Project Team would like to acknowledge the accomplishment of having three states, 12 offices, and hundreds of intergovernmental caseworkers come together and complete this grant project. There were challenges and lessons learned, but critical achievements occurred every time an intergovernmental worker looked on the bottom of the Transmittal #1 intergovernmental form in a new referral and saw the name, direct email address, and direct phone number for a worker in a project office listed. The behavior changes that happened as promised in the Pledge, were executed through the 3RG, or were shared at an Intersect Network were positive changes. Those positive changes increased efficiencies in intergovernmental case processing, enhanced agency customer service, and improved the morale and mission of intergovernmental casework to everyone with whom they shared a case.