

Child Support Report

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COMMISSIONER'S VOICE

Modernizing Child Support Enforcement Systems



Spring cleaning is in the air, and many states, territories, and tribes (collectively referred to as states) may be considering how to modernize their child support enforcement systems. Modernizing first generation systems required a state to prepare a comprehensive feasibility study using guidance from [1993](#) and policy clarifications of automated systems from [2006](#). This type of feasibility study is expensive (\$2M - \$5M) and time consuming; it could take up to three years to document (400-600 pages, plus attachments) and another year to collaborate through the OCSE review and approval process. In today's world of rapidly advancing technologies and system development platforms, this may result in a modernization choice that's obsolete before the project's development phase begins.

Streamlined Feasibility Study

OCSE determined that more efficient processes were required and developed the Streamlined Feasibility Study (FS) approach to simplify documentation associated with modernizing next generation child support systems. This simplified process recognizes the analysis that states are already performing, establishes a streamlined analytical approach, and develops a high-level framework for both analysis and document preparation. It also provides simplified cost analysis worksheets (and other supporting artifacts) to enable a state to analyze, compare, and document modernization alternatives efficiently.

Eliminates

- Function point, scoring, and weighting analyses
- Cost modeling, break-even point, and 15- to 20-year lifecycle cost analyses
- The need for a state to travel to other states to evaluate candidate transfer systems
- OCSE's preparation of a comprehensive Feasibility Study IV&V Report and required travel to a state for on-site IV&V assessment review meeting(s)

Reduces

- Level of effort for the requirements analysis, analysis of alternatives, cost benefit analysis, risk assessment, and alternative selection
- Level of detail and complexity for documentation to 50-100 pages for a streamlined FS document, plus cost spreadsheets and supporting artifacts/appendices as needed (and simplifies preparation by enabling state personnel to prepare these documents)
- Modernization Timeline = Planning Phase + Development Phase + first 3 years of the O&M Phase
- OCSE review time from 60 days to as little as two to three weeks.

Begin modernizations sooner

Using this Streamlined FS approach may significantly reduce the time, effort, and cost involved with conducting modernization studies. This approach potentially accelerates the federal review and approval process, enabling states to begin development of a solution sooner than they were able to previously. [Learn more about the Streamlined Feasibility Study approach.](#)

*Raghavan Varadachari, Director
Division of State and Tribal Systems*

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Helping Keep Kids Healthy

Millions of children and teens qualify for free or low-cost health and dental coverage through Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The [Connecting Kids to Coverage National Campaign](#) has resources to help agencies and national, regional, and local organizations continue effective outreach. Check out these materials in the [Outreach Tool Library](#) on [InsureKidsNow.gov](#).

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GRANTS

OCSE awarded \$2.2 million to 14 grantees through a two-year demonstration called [Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program](#). The following article continues our series featuring grantees testing approaches and analyzing data to see if digital marketing can help child support programs reach and serve families more effectively. For general information, contact OCSE project officers Michelle Jadcak at Michelle.Jadcak@acf.hhs.gov or Melody Morales at Melody.Morales@acf.hhs.gov.

Colorado Engages Stakeholders to Enhance Digital Marketing

Heather Rego, Marketing and Communications Specialist, Colorado Division of Child Support Services

At the Colorado Division of Child Support Services, we believe it's important for government agencies to demonstrate that they care about the people they serve. While implementing our digital marketing grant, we routinely solicited customer feedback for our interventions. We always remind ourselves: "How can an agency that serves people improve if they are not involving the families who receive its services?" Although that is a rhetorical question, the answer should be obvious. We cannot improve if we do not listen to our customer.

The Family Voice Council

For our interventions, we used a key group of stakeholders known as the Family Voice Council. The Council is made up of 20 community members who use Colorado Department of Human Services programs. The Council's mission is to improve the quality and delivery of services for all Coloradans by providing thoughtful input that helps achieve agency goals. Council members meet monthly to share experiences and provide honest feedback on proposed policy and practice changes. To encourage participation, members receive a \$100 gift card at every meeting, plus reimbursement for travel and child care expenses.

Informing our digital marketing

Council members provided feedback throughout the planning period of our first intervention, improving our website's layout and content to meet the needs of our customers. We also solicited the Council's feedback during the development of our second intervention, a Facebook ad campaign. Their feedback on content and images provided additional insight on ways to engage our customers. The Council's input was crucial to selecting key messages and images for the campaign.

The Family Voice Council has been an indispensable partner in the success of our digital marketing grant. We plan to continue our partnership as we implement our final intervention, a fully functional online application for child support services. To learn more about the Family Voice Council and how Colorado leveraged their input, contact Heather Rego at 303-229-5170 or Heather.Rego@state.co.us.

The Family Voice Council has been an indispensable partner in the success of our digital marketing grant.

You're a leader.
You're a change maker.
You use **these services**.
So, who better to
make them better ...
Than you?

TANF • SNAP • Child Care Assistance • Child Welfare • Child Support • Adult Aging • Veterans Services

Join the
Family Voice Council &
help improve these services

- Share your experiences and honest feedback.
- Meetings are once a month.
- Community members who use our services are needed.
- If you've never been on a council before, no problem! We just need people with time and interest in guiding us to improve services.

You'll get:
\$100 gift card at
each meeting
+
Cash reimbursement to
pay for transportation
& childcare

  **COLORADO**
Department of Human Services

PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

Vermont’s Success in Continuously Improving Behavioral Interventions

Alexia Venafra, Deputy Director, Vermont Office of Child Support

When the Vermont Office of Child Support (OCS) received the Behavioral Interventions in Child Support (BICS) grant in 2015, it identified two primary goals for the intervention based on caseworker feedback:

- Increase parent participation in the establishment of parentage and child support orders and in the order modification process
- Increase the number of cases where the parents reached a stipulation on at least one important issue outside of court

BICS Intervention

OCS used behavioral economics and procedural justice concepts to improve the written notices sent to parents, add personalized reminder calls, and create a new out-of-court meeting called a “resolution meeting.” This resolution meeting allowed parents to discuss their cases with OCS case managers in hopes of reaching a stipulation. A randomized control trial was used to measure outcomes. This BICS intervention achieved both of its primary goals.

• Increased the rate at which both parents participated

· from 26.3% of the control group

· to 34.7% of the intervention group

• Increased the proportion of cases with stipulations

· from 12.4% of control group cases

· to 23.7% of intervention group cases

Streamlined online resolution meetings

Given these promising results, OCS sought to implement resolution meetings statewide and first set up a small workgroup to streamline the process. The workgroup interviewed all facilitators to identify challenges and propose improvements. One important lesson was that it was ineffective to conduct resolution meetings on certain categories of cases. But before changes could be implemented, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and the workgroup had to transition to online resolution meetings. Table 1 lists the key changes made to the resolution meeting process based on feedback and the need to avoid in-person contact due to COVID-19.

Table 1: Key Changes to the BICS Intervention Process

	Resolution Meetings (BICS Intervention)	Streamlined Online Resolution Meetings (BICS Legacy)
Case Types	All paternity, establishment, and modification cases	Based on BICS Intervention feedback, cases not appropriate for online resolution meetings were filtered out, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caretaker cases • Intergovernmental cases • Cases where there was a history of family violence or combative relationships or where at least one parent was incarcerated*
Meeting Notice	Meeting time/place scheduled and a notice mailed to parents without their input	Meeting scheduled with input and agreement from both parents**
Reminder	Reminder phone calls 5 and 1 day(s) before the meeting by someone other than the facilitator	Reminder email the day before the meeting by the facilitator*
Format	In-person participation requested	Video or phone participation requested*

*Behavioral economics concept (BEC): Friction costs; Procedural justice concept (PCJ): Respect

**BECs: Friction Costs, Pre-Commitment; PCJs: Respect, Voice, Helpfulness

Online resolution meetings launched statewide on September 1, 2020, and it has taken some time for staff to integrate the change (which included navigating new technological tools). While the data is still limited and preliminary (only 463 cases), it is showing promising results.

• Increased the rate at which both parents participated

· from 34.7% of the BICS intervention group cases

· to 60.0% of online resolution meeting cases

• Increased the proportion of cases with stipulations

· from 23.7% of the BICS intervention group cases

· to 37.1% of online resolution meeting cases

It is difficult to say whether some or all of the four key changes in Table 1 are responsible for the improved outcomes, but it seems these collective changes are working. It is noteworthy that of the 463 cases assessed in the second intervention, only 35 (7.6%) were ultimately set for an online resolution meeting. This suggests that being deliberate about the types of cases assigned to online resolution meetings not only increases efficiency, but also improves outcomes. Time will tell.

Building Employer-Employee Relations Through Appreciation

Alice P. Jacobsohn, Esq., Government Relations, American Payroll Association

Employee engagement is the emotional commitment an employee has to the organization. The Workplace Research Foundation reports that engaged employees are 38% more likely to have above average productivity. A recent Gallup study also showed that employee absenteeism decreased by 41% when employees were engaged. However, that same Gallup study found that only 33% of employees in the United States report feeling engaged at work. Competitive pay and benefits are essential, but most employees want something more from their jobs. They want to be appreciated.

National employee appreciation efforts

National Employee Appreciation Day is a moment to reflect on the value of employees to your organization by celebrating their achievements. This special day in March each year should serve as a reminder to build meaningful employee appreciation into the culture of your organization.

Employee appreciation is not an easy concept for organization leaders. Rarely do we show gratitude to employees for just doing their job. Instead, management

rewards employees who perform better than others. These rewards are important, but they are not the same as appreciation. Consider the ability to retain qualified employees and the survival of your organization at a time when budgets are tight and pay increases and performance awards are not possible.

At the American Payroll Association (APA), we hold an employee appreciation week each fall, called National Payroll Week (NPW), to “celebrate America’s employees and the payroll professionals who pay them.” An NPW planning guide offers tips on how to celebrate successfully. For example, decorate the workspace (even if it’s virtual) with an appreciation theme or wear an “employee appreciation” t-shirt during a group event.

In addition to celebrating during NPW, payroll professionals engage young adults about financial literacy and paycheck basics, such as how paychecks are calculated. Resources include a webpage dedicated to child support that explains the role of employers, including reporting new hires, processing Income Withholding Orders, and making payments to State Disbursement Units.

How to show appreciation year-round

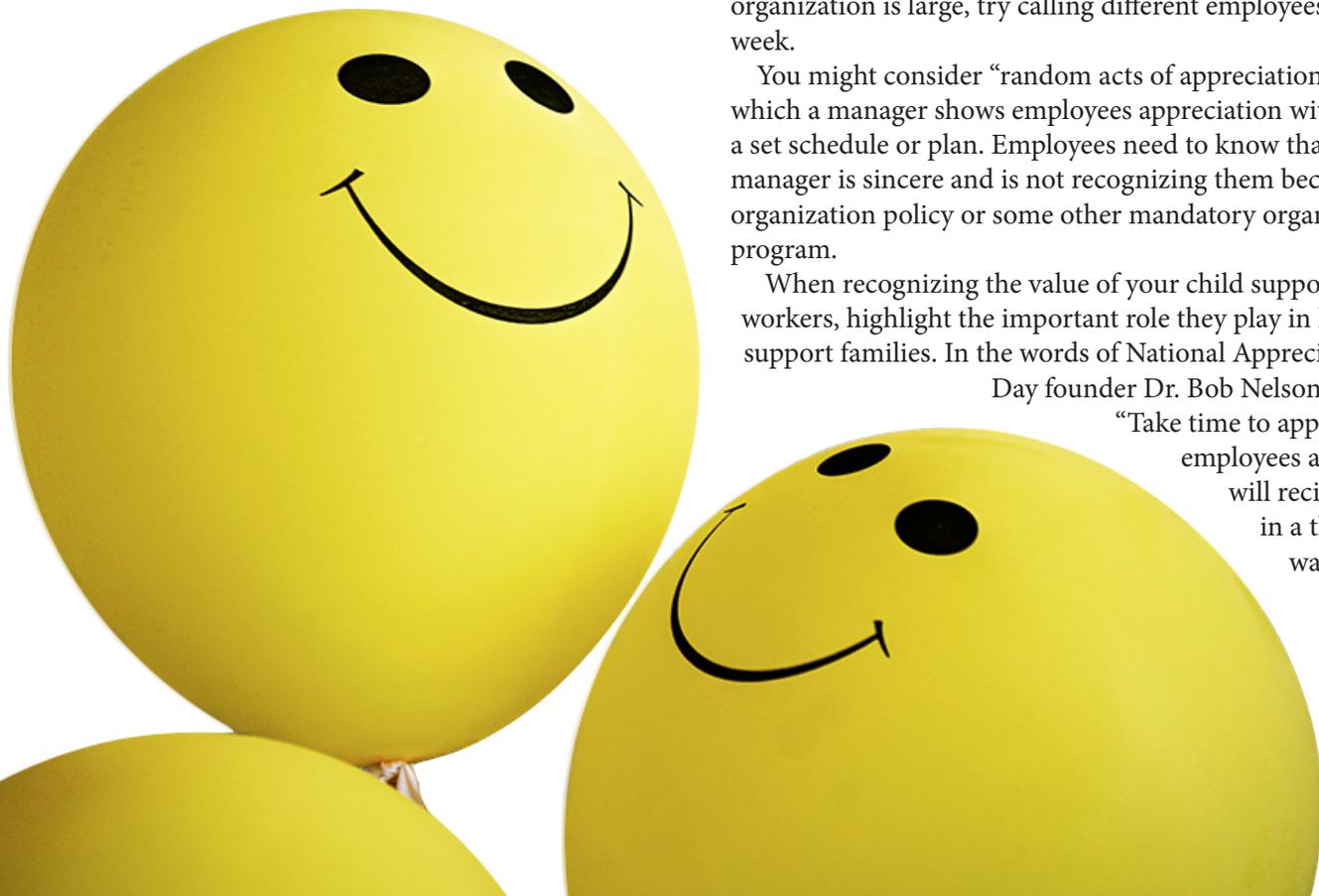
Organization leaders should not wait for an event to recognize employees. When was the last time organization leaders walked down the hall or popped into a meeting to say, “Thank you, I appreciate the work you’re doing”? Have managers thanked employees in separate communication from virtual meetings and for no other purpose? If your organization is large, try calling different employees each week.

You might consider “random acts of appreciation” in which a manager shows employees appreciation without a set schedule or plan. Employees need to know that a manager is sincere and is not recognizing them because of organization policy or some other mandatory organization program.

When recognizing the value of your child support workers, highlight the important role they play in helping support families. In the words of National Appreciation

Day founder Dr. Bob Nelson,

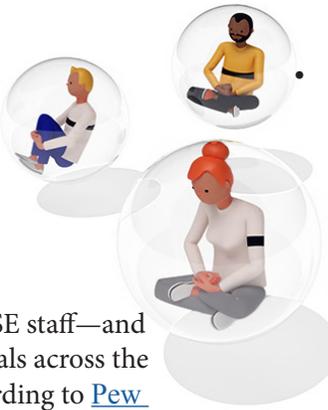
“Take time to appreciate employees and they will reciprocate in a thousand ways.”



IN FOCUS

Telework Lessons in a Year of Trauma

By Rose Bynum, OCSE Program Specialist, Region III



This month marks one year since OCSE staff—and many other child support professionals across the country—transitioned to telework. According to [Pew Research](#), before the pandemic, one in five employees nationwide worked remotely; now, 71% work from home.

Over the past year, we've struggled to learn how to operate new technologies and manage the stress of the pandemic to continue to help families thrive. I had to deliberately change how I teleworked to ensure I was bringing the best me to work every day. Here are ways I found that you can enhance your telework experience and care for yourself and your colleagues:

- Practice self-care: It's easy to feel overwhelmed and exhausted. If your office has a wellness program, take advantage of their experts, webinars, and other resources to help you navigate daily stressors. I've found office programs like Mindful Moment Mondays and Take Twenty Tuesdays (for stretching) to be extremely helpful.
- Stay connected with colleagues: Working from home and only communicating via email can make you feel isolated. If you have a question for someone, give them a call, set up a video chat, or send a quick instant message (Teams, Jabber, Slack, etc.) to talk it out. Reach out to colleagues—even if it's not related to work—to say hello and catch up. We don't always know what colleagues are going through, and checking in on them and actively listening can be a meaningful way to show you care.
- Create a dedicated workspace: Try to find a room or area that you can make a dedicated space to help establish a work zone free of distractions. Surround yourself with things you love, like family photos, favorite candles, beautiful art, and more. If you can't create a separate, dedicated space, close your laptop and put it away at the end of the day to avoid "bringing work home."

- Take breaks: Just as you took breaks and moved around the office pre-pandemic, make sure you do the same at home. I enjoy taking a lunchtime walk to clear my head, get some fresh air, and say hello to neighbors in the community. For longer breaks—whether for the evening or a weekend—make sure you're able to disconnect and take some real time off. Talk with your supervisor to ensure work coverage, unplug your laptop, and turn off notifications to truly rest and recharge.
- Dress for work: Wearing pajamas all day can make you feel too relaxed and less motivated to work. Each morning, dress for work—even if more casually than you would at the office—to get ready to tackle the day ahead.
- Enjoy non-screen time: Because in-person meetings have been replaced by virtual meetings, we don't get as many breaks from a computer screen as we did before the pandemic. When you take a break throughout the day, try not to get on your phone or watch television (i.e., moving from one screen to another). Try calling a family member, reading a chapter in a book, listening to a podcast, or stepping outside for some fresh air.

I hope these telework tips help you care for yourself—and others—so that we can continue to help families thrive. For more tips and resources, visit [ACF's blog on how to telework successfully](#).

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Teleworking Tips?

Do you have a telework tip that's worked for you? Send your tips to CSR.Editor@acf.hhs.gov and we'll try to share them in a future issue.