

Position Statement

2023

Modernization – Technology Investments

Proposal

Issue:

Modernization of human services programs, processes, and technology is imperative to effectiveness and sustainability of publicly funded human services. The current system is complex, fragmented, administratively burdensome for all, and doesn't produce the outcomes Minnesotans need from these critical community supports.

Modernization efforts at the state level in recent years have not kept pace with the rapidly changing technology and service environment. There is now an opportunity to change that. Recent initiatives like the Gartner assessment of Minnesota's modernization approach and Code for America's implementation of the MNBenefits application point to a promising path forward. They offer a new framework for modernization that emphasizes agile and iterative delivery of tools that make service engagement easier and better for the people we serve while also being attentive to the needs of county and tribal agencies.

Alongside the need for new technology to support service delivery transformation is the need to sustain and improve the existing core systems county workers rely upon for their day to day work. Most of the systems DHS requires counties to use are 20 to 30 years old. They are too limited, too inflexible, and too inefficient. Persistent County workforce shortages are adding to the strain. We cannot wait years for new systems to be procured or developed. A more transitional approach is needed, one that addresses county pain points in the short term while putting the state on a solid path toward systems and practice transformation.

MACSSA continues to support movement toward an integrated service delivery and the Gartner recommendation with an initial emphasis on the eligibility and enrollment processes that are currently managed in systems like MAXIS, MEC2 and METS. At the same time, there is a growing recognition among counties that the social service programs administered in the SSIS system also require renewed attention and investment.

Limitations in the DHS technology budget have constrained the state's ability to respond to the demand counties have for improved technology systems and have inhibited its ability to implement the Gartner recommendations and roadmap. DHS leadership has renewed its commitment to service and systems transformation and has expressed a desire to respond more directly and effectively to the technology needs of counties and the people we serve. DHS and MNIT, however do not have the financial resources needed to pull down federal matching funds and truly invest in the solutions counties are demanding.

Implementation Strategy:

MACSSA will advocate for **major financial investment in systems transformation**, including state/county/tribal technology modernization and administrative simplification.

MACSSA supports investments that:

- Advance projects that **improve user experience and reduce administrative burden** for both clients and workers in addition to planning for modernized state eligibility systems
- Architect and implement a technology environment that **is person-centered and provides interoperability** across state systems and local systems
- Support **innovation and efficiency at a county level** by providing counties with more **direct access to the data** that resides in DHS systems
- Allocate a portion of state transformation funds and enhanced federal **funding to local county innovation efforts** and for **implementation of new state-provided technologies**.
- Restore resources and projects to **address the functional gaps that persist in the METS system**
- **Improve the capabilities and usability of SSIS**, a system that has fallen out of sync with evolving service and case management practices
- **Sustain the other existing DHS technology systems** that counties depend upon to do their work until such time as they can be moved to newer technologies

**Systemic Priority Alignment
(highlight all that apply and explain why)**

- **Equity**
- **Integrated Services**
- **Fiscal Framework**

Comments:

The current Modernization strategic plan and implementation strategies prioritizes equity considerations and authentic community engagement. Work to date has leveraged trusted partners, such as the Wilder Foundation, to conduct community engagement, particularly within communities experiencing disparate impacts. Furthermore, tools to measure impact on equity will be incorporated into the evaluation framework. From the GARE Toolkit (See www.racialequityalliance.org): What are the racial equity impacts of this particular decision? Who will benefit from or be burdened by it? Are there strategies to mitigate unintended consequences? In summary, current approaches to Modernization will answer these questions.

As noted earlier, the strategic plan and the recent Gartner report validates the Integrated Services Business Model (ISBM). They also validate the concept of a human services practice and technology ecosystem that extends beyond DHS and MNIT supported programs and technologies. Data is the foundation of this ecosystem and is essential to integrated services and interoperability.

Lastly, this Modernization position acknowledges the role the state, counties, tribes, and partners have in developing and resourcing Minnesota's human services practice and technology ecosystem. It encourages blended fiscal solutions that promote appropriate and shared accountability for the system and its outcomes.

MACSSA believes that counties, tribes, and DHS should continue operationalizing effective solutions. There is real value in increasing equity and ease of access to services to all Minnesotans. County agencies are innovating and allocating funding along with staff resources to create operational solutions and there is concern of further fragmentation due to lack of interoperability between county agencies and potential state government systems. DHS and counties need to find ways to innovate together. These principles, including the focus on interoperability, align with the recent final deliverable from the Gartner Curam Assessment project and its updated implementation roadmap for Modernization.

Relevant Committee (highlight all that apply and explain why)

- **Modernization**
- **Adult Services**
- **Behavioral Health**
- **Children's Services**
- **Policy**
- **Self-Sufficiency**

Why:

The Modernization committee was formed for the express purpose of advancing MACSSA's interests in this topic area. Its membership includes the people who represent MACSSA on DHS modernization governance groups.

Rationale/Background:

Counties and tribes have been promoting these principles for many years. The below are historic rationales from MACSSA. These principles align with the jointly owned Modernization Strategic Plan.

- Modernization is needed to build in equity within our system and eliminate disparities.
- Form should follow function; design is people-centered. The consolidation and redesign of State information technology organizations should work to maintain and improve the service-orientation of people-serving systems. This "customer-service focus" is balanced with the necessity of ensuring equity of services, maintaining data security, privacy, client safety, reporting accountability and reducing fraud.
- The health and human services system should be architected as a State-County enterprise. Within an enterprise, outcomes are a whole interplay of "policies, processes, and systems throughout the organization"
- Counties are partners in an extended enterprise architecture framework; we are the primary "business owner" of the health and human services delivery system; we are the business customer of the State-County I.T. systems and counties, and our clients and providers are the end-users of state-county enterprise solutions. Counties have representation at many levels within the current governance structure.
- The State and Counties should strategically align; service (business) needs should drive systems, processes, and solutions. Business needs and requirements for the state-county enterprise are legislative and policy mandates; strategic missions, visions, strategies, and desired outcomes within a performance management architecture, as well as preferred administrative (business) processes, which drive technology infrastructure and solutions.
- Digital era government and governance can be facilitated by direct service. The future state of the system is realized when the public has remote access to self-service by "anyone, anyplace, anytime"; the service provider is enabled at the point of service; the taxpayer sees and understands apparent results; intergovernmental transactions are sleek and unmediated; and people-serving agencies and groups connect to one another to collaborate on their programs and services.

- IT service (business) solutions need to be affordable, effective, and sustainable. The current business model for information technology does not meet these criteria. The enterprise architecture should be integrated and inter-operable with reusable solutions. The architecture must also be flexible and scalable.

Modernization efforts should achieve these goals:

- Provide people with more choice and greater control over their services
- Produce a simplified human services system that proactively addresses individual, family, and community needs, while increasing equity
- Support increased use of data to improve service delivery while putting consumers in the driver's seat as to how they want their data used
- Introduce and enhance modernized technology tools and supports that automate tasks and save time so staff can focus on supporting individuals and families
- Reduce the growth in administrative costs by simplifying, automating, integrating systems and processes
- Provide frequent, incremental improvements to county service delivery capabilities (including continuous improvement of existing systems to meet immediate needs)



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Approved on: