Year 1 of the E-referral Demonstration: Process Study and Study Design Recommendations

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Introduction

Background

In 2007, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) awarded Washington's Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCS) an 1115 demonstration grant with the goal of improving cooperation between DCS and its sister agencies. Through the proposed demonstration, DCS committed to invest in a focused, three-year project to revamp and reinvigorate its five-year old e-referral process. E-Referral is the electronic process by which the clients associated with new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Medicaid cases are referred by Community Service Offices (CSOs) to DCS for enforcement services.

The demonstration consists of two key interventions:

- **Expansion of data sharing with vital records and full automation of the data exchange**. DCS currently shares voluntary paternity affidavit data with the Department of Health (DOH)—Washington's vital records department—and has expanded its data sharing agreement to include marriage, divorce, and death certificate records. But more important, DCS is in the process of fully automating its data exchange with DOH, which will ultimately eliminate the need for cumbersome case-by-case record checks.

- **Statewide training of TANF/Medicaid and DCS staff on the process of referring new cases.** During 2004, a DCS/TANF workgroup identified staff training on e-referrals as a critical state need. The group, which was convened through OCSE's *Better Outcomes Through Collaboration* seminars, found DCS and TANF/Medicaid have different interpretations of the NCP screen data fields and that no systematic training was available. Through the demonstration,DCS will document existing referral processes, identify strengths and weaknesses across the state, and build a joint TANF/Medicaid/DCS training curriculum to sharply improve the quality of information transferred by TANF/Medicaid.

DCS managers anticipate that more accurate and complete e-referrals will expedite the enforcement of child support for new TANF and Medicaid cases. Stronger, upfront information will save a considerable amount of DCS staff time, prevent inappropriate paternity referrals to the courts, and get cash and medical support to children sooner. DCS currently receives about 1,400 referrals monthly with incomplete or no information about the NCP. Through the 1115 demonstration, management expects to cut that number by half or more.

Through improved e-referrals, Washington will address at least three goals in OCSE's strategic plan:

- **Improve rates of paternity establishment** (OCSE Goal 1). By setting the case up appropriately and incorporating all the information known to DOH, DCS can quickly isolate and target those cases that truly need paternity establishment services. DCS and prosecuting attorneys will no longer start judicial establishment motions only to later discover a voluntary affidavit or evidence of marriage. Automated links with DOH will also improve the quality of DCS's paternity data and increase the likelihood the division will pass its annual audits.

- **Expedite the establishment of orders for support** (OCSE Goal 2). Incomplete or inaccurate referrals slow down the support establishment process. In some cases, DCS officers may be investigating old, inappropriate addresses when an interview or untapped database has more current information. In other instances, DCS officers may be starting from scratch on locate when they clearly should not have to. DCS expects a measurable decrease in the elapsed time between the DCS case opening and the establishment of cash support. A rigorous evaluation will be able to precisely measure the effects of the new system.

- **Strengthen the efficiency and responsiveness of DCS operations** (OCSE Goal 5). The inefficiency of the current system is widely recognized by frontline DCS staff across the state. By invigorating the efforts of TANF/Medicaid staff and making full use of all information known to the state, a revamped e-referral system will sharply reduce the amount of unnecessary investigative work associated with new cases. The state anticipates DCS, TANF, and Medicaid satisfaction with the referral process will measurably improve over the course of the demonstration.

Purpose of this report

As a condition of the grant, DCS must evaluate the demonstration. DCS contracted with ECONorthwest and its subcontractor, The Lewin Group, to conduct the evaluation. The publication of this first evaluation report comes at the end of the first year of the demonstration. At this point in the project, DCS has not implemented, nor did it anticipate implementing, either data matches or training. Data matching could be operational as soon as December 2008, and training will occur during early Spring 2009.

This first year report outlines the current processes used by CSO and DCS staff to generate and accept e-referrals, assesses the feasibility of a DCS-DOH data match, and recommends an approach to evaluation of the soon-to-be implemented interventions. The balance of the report consists of three chapters:

- **Chapter 2: E-referral process study**. This chapter documents the details of how the electronic referral process works from the perspectives of CSOs, SEMS, and DCS frontline workers. Based on site visit interviews with field staff, the study concludes that CSOs vary in the time devoted to the assembly of information about non-

custodial parents of TANF or Medicaid-eligible children. The variation in practices suggests training could yield positive impacts.

- **Chapter 3**: **DCS-DOH data match feasibility**. To date, the majority of the demonstration's activity was devoted to developing a data sharing agreement between DCS and DOH that would permit overnight exchanges of birth, marriage, divorce, and death records related to members of child support cases. This chapter describes the challenges faced by the two agencies in crafting the ultimately successful agreement. With the agreement in place, programming staff in both agencies developed and initiated testing of an overnight exchange of birth records.

- **Chapter 4: Recommended Evaluation Design**. During the first year of the demonstration, ECONorthwest and DCS have discussed a variety of means by which to evaluate the impacts on the two interventions. DCS and ECONorthwest agree randomized trials would be technically challenging and expensive to implement. In this final chapter, ECONorthwest recommends an analysis of case-level records contained in Washington's longitudinal research database. Assuming staggered implementation of interventions across the state, ECONorthwest will be able to isolate the impacts of the data match and training on a number of key child support outcomes.

E-Referral Process Study

Background

In April 2003, the Economic Services Division changed its process for transmitting information from the Community Services Division (CSD) to the Division of Child Support (DCS). Prior to that time, information about non-custodial parents was provided by a custodial parent TANF recipient on a paper referral form. This paper referral was forwarded from CSD to DCS. The electronic referral process (hereafter, referred to as "e-referrals") was implemented to comply with federal regulations.

Now five years into the transition, DCS staff sees room for improvement in the electronic process. Field office surveys uniformly pointed to incomplete, and otherwise inadequate, referrals as limiting CSE's initial establishment and enforcement actions on numerous new child support cases. Staff most frequently mentioned insufficient information on non-custodial parents and unreliable paternity indicators. One survey respondent summarized the CSE frustration: "We seldom get enough information to know where to start."

A six-month analysis of e-referral data supports the CSE staff's claims. In an average month, CSE receives about 2,800 referrals that trigger new cases. About 600 instances reference a non-custodial parent already associated with DCS, and in those cases, DCS typically has solid identifying information (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Quality of e-referral NCP information
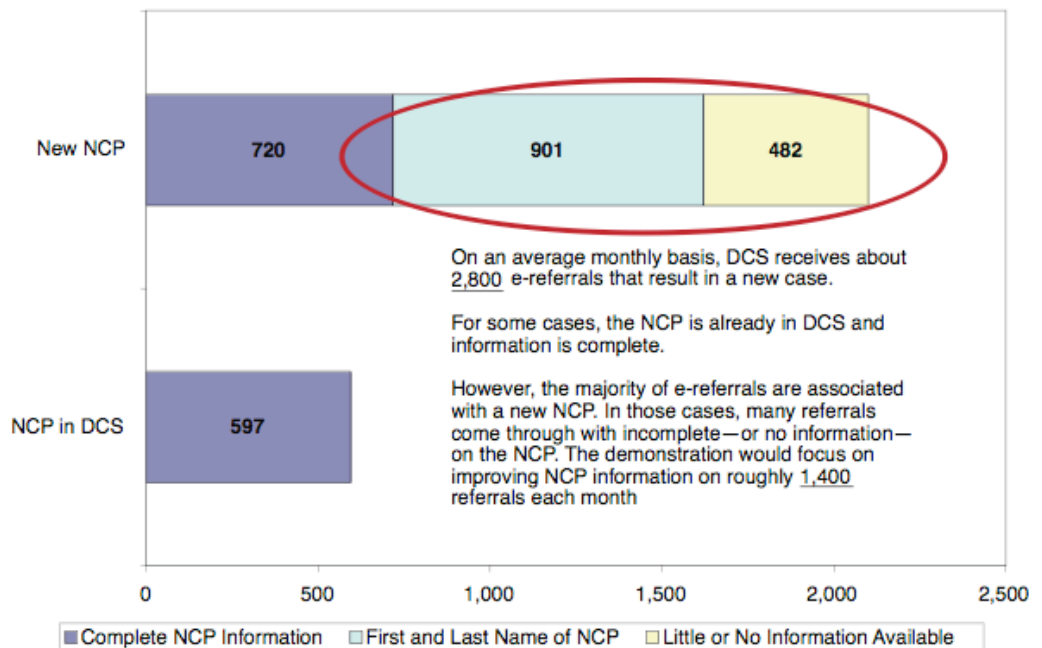
Source: DCS-SEMS

The remaining 2,200 monthly referrals make reference to an NCP who is not currently associated with a DCS case. Of those new NCP referrals, only about 700 have complete information (name and social security number);

900 provide a name only; and about 500 referrals each month provide nothing. When incomplete referrals come through, CSE staff can review vital records information—held by DOH—on a case-by-case basis. However, the volume of referrals coming through monthly means staff spends significant time tracking down NCP location information that is already known to a sister agency.

To address these shortcomings, DCS applied for and was awarded an 1115 demonstration grant that will test two interventions:

- **Automated data matches between DCS and the Department of Health, which holds vital records on births, deaths, marriages, and divorces.**

- **Training of TANF intake workers to improve the quality of NCP-related information assembled during the TANF application process**.

Before it can effectively launch either of these reforms, DCS needs a more precise understanding of where and how the existing process breaks down. The purpose of this chapter is to document e-referral practices from the perspectives of both TANF intake specialists and SEOs. The project team visited staff in five CSOs (Columbia River, Federal Way, King South, Pierce South, and Spokane Valley) and five DCS field offices (Olympia, Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, and Vancouver)

The next section describes the e-referral process from the perspective of the CSO and describes how information about child support, and the NCP specifically, fits into the overall TANF application process. Then, we turn to the SEOs and discuss their perspectives on the e-referral. The chapter concludes with recommendations, gleaned from staff observations, that will help DCS fine tune its automation and training interventions.

CSO e-referral process

The CSO visits were primarily designed to develop a better understanding of the e-referral process from the TANF perspective. In particular, the project team explored the process by which CSO workers obtain information from current and prospective TANF clients about absent parents. The following section describes the process by which CSOs attempt to obtain this information, some of the steps individual offices have taken to improve collection of this information and collaborative efforts with DCS, and potential areas for improvement.

TANF intake processes

The project team conducted interviews with an array of CSO workers to understand the E-referral process from the CSO perspective. Typically, the project

team met with the office administrator, one or more supervisors, and several line workers. The conversations sought to explore the typical client flow as it relates to the interaction between TANF and DCS, as well as the impressions CSO staff had about child support and the E-referral process.

Looking across CSOs, no uniform intake procedure exists for TANF applicants. While staff in each of the CSOs visited follows the same general protocol, each office has slight differences in the assignment of cases and the customer flow.

Data Elements in ACES NCPS Screen

Head of household
- Name
- Client ID

Non-custodial parent
- Name
- Date of birth
- Sex
- Social Security Number
- Last address
- Phone number
- Last employer name and address
- Court order (divorce, paternity)
- Court location
- Marital status/marriage date
- Native American Tribal code
- Deceased (Y/N)
- Date of death
- Reason if NCP is unknown (*e.g.*, mail in application, CP declined to answer, CP does not know)

Child(ren)
- Name
- Relationship to NCP (*e.g.*, father, mother, paternity affidavit, alleged father)

Other
- Caretaker ID
- IV-D cooperation status

CSOs handle an array of benefit programs in addition to TANF. Most intake workers are generalists and process applications for other benefit programs in addition to TANF. However, most visited offices have either a dedicated TANF intake team or a designated group of intake workers that handle the bulk of TANF applications. After filling out a paper TANF application, applicants are typically directed to a CSO worker responsible for screening applicants. These interviews are usually not prescheduled, and they are relatively informal. They represent an opportunity for the applicant to ask any questions about TANF and for the CSO worker to explain the basic responsibilities that come with TANF receipt. CSO staff indicated that this is often the first point at which the issue of child support emerges. In many cases, applicants are unaware that they must assign the rights to their child support to DSHS and cooperate with DCS in identifying the absent parent as a condition of TANF receipt. While this is often an initial concern for parents, CSO staff indicated that very few parents decide to withdraw their applications as a result of these conditions.

CSO staff in one office also indicated that they use these screening interviews as an opportunity to take a brief look at the applicant's overall financial picture. In some cases, applicants are already receiving child support and receipt of TANF benefits will result in only a small increase in their income, while simultaneously drawing time from their lifetime benefit limit.

Following the submission of the paper application and the preliminary screening, applicants are scheduled for the lengthier intake interview. Some CSOs hold regularly scheduled orientations for TANF applicants, while others present orientation information individually during the interview process. Typically, offices allot between 60 and 90 minutes for the initial intake, and questions about the absent parent are standard procedure in all TANF intake interviews. The Noncustodial Parent (NCP) screen in the DSHS Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES)[1]'s prompts the worker to request as much relevant information as possible about the absent parent (see text box above).

> **Staff thoughts on automation of the referral process**
>
> CSO workers provided a range of perspectives and the relative effectiveness of the E-referral process compared to the past paper-based referral system. Generally, TANF workers were very supportive of the change. In addition to cutting down on the amount of paperwork, they indicated that the automated ACES interface helps streamline the process.
>
> Some staff noted specific downsides to the automation. In some cases, employees suggested that the automated interface reduces the extent to which staff will ask probing questions of applicants who are reluctant to provide information about the absent parent. They noted that, in the paper-based system, workers would typically fill out as many fields as possible before completing the child support portion of the interview. The ACES NCP screen lets workers proceed with after entering only minimal information (or simply "Unknown"). While there are some situations in which the absent parent is truly unknown, interviewees suggested that many intake workers will enter "Unknown" in lieu of more aggressively pursuing NCP information.

The actual length of the interview varies substantially based on the applicant's household composition. Families with multiple children and multiple absent parents require longer interviews. In these cases, it can be quite time consuming to collect all of the relevant information about each child and each potential absent parent, although staff generally indicated that the child support portion of intake requires a relatively small amount of time (rarely more than five or ten minutes).

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[1] ACES is Washington's management information system for TANF and related programs.

Typically, the intake worker will give the applicant Form 18334 ("Rights and Responsibilities") during this portion of the interview. While the applicant is reading and signing this form, the staff member will ask for information about the absent parent.

While the TANF intake process is relatively scripted—workers are prompted to ask specific eligibility questions by ACES—staff indicated that some level of experience with TANF intake increases interviewers' ability to elicit useful information during the limited time available for intake. By having a dedicated TANF unit, staff can better handle the various questions related to child support that can arise during the intake interview (*e.g.*, how TANF receipt will affect existing child support orders, how non-cooperation with DCS affects TANF payments). Furthermore, staff indicated that inexperienced intake workers often feel uncomfortable asking the probing questions required to gather quality information about the absent parent (*e.g.*, determining which of several sexual partners is most likely the absent father when an individual is unsure). Practice allows staff to feel comfortable asking applicants for highly personal information.

However, conversations with staff from different CSOs suggested substantial variation in the extent to which workers probe clients about the absent father. Some staff will aggressively probe when applicants are not forthcoming with information about the absent parent, but interviewees typically felt that their responsibility is only to make the initial inquiry into the identity of the absent parent. Most noted that, beyond a certain point, it is the responsibility of DCS to obtain this information.

Intake workers explain the possible sanctions for noncooperation and make a good faith effort to get the information, but these workers do not see themselves as enforcement

> **Pregnant women applying for TANF**
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> Conversations with staff in all of the CSOs visited suggest a potential area for improvement in terms of the data collection process. Staff indicated that they often process new applications for pregnant women. If applicants apply for TANF prior to giving birth (and have no other children) staff are not prompted by ACES to ask about the absent parent. If, after the birth, the parent takes the infant exemption, it can be a year before the parent is back in the TANF office. Some line workers indicated that they will still ask clients for information about the father. However, instead of entering this data into the NCPS screen, they will add it as a narrative (on one of several different screens, depending on the worker). The degree to which workers collect this information varies, and there is no prompt in the system which indicates that this information is available. In addition, interviews with DCS staff indicated that they rarely read the CSO narratives, and there is no prompt informing them that these cases have information included in the narrative about the absent parent.

officers. At several sites, in addition to noncooperation, interviewees noted that it is especially difficult to obtain good information when the applicant is not the biological parent of the child (*e.g.*, the applicant is an aunt or grandparent). These cases have two absent parents, and the caretaker may have good information about only one of them.

CSO workers identified several common challenges to obtaining quality information about the absent parent during the intake interview. The most common challenge occurs in cases where the applicant either does not remember who the father is or is unwilling to divulge the information. Staff suggested that almost all applicants know who the absent parent is, but, for one reason or another, are reluctant to share the information, frequently claiming to not remember.

A second challenge frequently faced by intake workers occurs in cases with multiple children and multiple absent parents. It is often difficult to track the various absent parents while entering the information into the NCP screen. Because the system will not allow the intake worker to proceed with the interview unless the appropriate number of NCP screens have been filled out (*i.e.*, at least one for every child in the household), the child support portion of the interview can often end up being quite time consuming. CSO staff indicated that there are some workers who, instead of gathering the necessary data for each individual absent parent, will simply use the same information for all of the children regardless of whether or not that individual is indeed the right person.

Communication with DCS

CSO staff was generally complementary when discussing their relationship with DCS. While some interviewees acknowledged previously confrontational attitudes between the two agencies, they emphasized the common goals the two agencies shared in terms of serving children. CSO staff was typically very supportive of a collaborative relationship between the two agencies. While CSO workers had varying degrees of understanding regarding the specifics of the relationship between the two agencies, all staff understood the potential role that child support could play in helping their clients achieve self-sufficiency and the reasons why TANF applicants are required to assign the rights to child support to the state as a condition of TANF receipt.

Conversations with CSO staff suggested substantial variation in the method and extent to which they interact with DCS. Aside from interactions with co-located DCS workers, CSO staff indicated that their interactions with DCS were fairly minimal. CSO staff indicated that they are most likely to call DCS regarding expected child support payment amounts or sanction issues related to either good cause or non-cooperation. However, CSO staff noted that it is usually DCS that has questions for them.

In one DCS region, the DCS administrator has set up a dedicated toll-free number that CSO workers in the region can use to contact DCS with questions. The line is designed in such a way that calls are automatically routed to whichever DCS SEO is available at the time, maximizing the chance that, for every call, a live person

answers the phone. With the exception of this DCS region , CSO workers generally indicated that they avoid the more formal lines of communication in favor of more informal approaches. CSO staff indicated that they either email a DCS worker they know personally (*e.g.*, from past cases or as a former colleague) or the DCS worker listed on the client's record.

At the management level, administrators in all of the offices visited indicated that they, or one of their representatives, regularly attend Local Planning Area (LPA) meetings. While these meetings do not usually address E-referrals, they do serve as a venue for administrators to raise concerns should the need arise. In the past, these meetings have also served as a venue for administrators to raise the possibility of co-location or cross training. However, conversations with staff suggested that these types of issues have not been recent agenda items.

Co-location

DCS staff is co-located in several of the CSOs visited as part of this study. Typically, this co-location involved a single DCS staff person out-stationed at a CSO for some portion of the week. In addition to working their normal DCS caseload, these workers provide a variety of more informal services.

The exact co-location model varies by CSO and DCS region. In one DCS region, the office has co-located staff in all of the large CSOs in its catchment area. Although DCS provided the co-located staff as a result of requests from individual CSOs, the DCS office also provides a staff person to supervise and coordinate the co-located staff in the various CSOs. In other DCS regions, the co-location was born out of individual relationships between heads of DCS office and CSOs.

CSO and DCS staffers indicated that out-stationed staff served a valuable role as liaisons between DCS and TANF, both through their work with CSO staff and through direct interaction with clients. CSO workers were extremely supportive of having co-located staff. In addition to providing immediate answers to client questions, they noted the utility of having an informal venue through which to ask questions of DCS. CSO staff noted frequent difficulties in getting quick responses from DCS about individual cases. Having a personal relationship with a DCS employee makes it easier to get timely information.

Staff in several CSOs indicated that TANF clients (as well as NCPs) will visit the CSO to meet with the DCS worker about an array of issues. Often TANF clients who are being sanctioned for noncooperation will come in to provide information about the absent parent to the DCS worker. Because of the co-location, the DCS worker can quickly verify the information and transmit the necessary documentation so that a CSO worker can lift the sanction immediately. One of the co-located DCS workers also reported that word had spread to the community that parents could submit paternity affidavits to her at the CSO without having to pay the filing fee.

One of the most common requests that the co-located DCS staff get is regarding prospective budgeting (*i.e.*, the expected payment levels from NCPs). CSO staff

indicated that, when helping clients with budgeting (and in attempting to help them preserve their time-limited TANF benefits), it is useful to have a DCS staff person provide a better picture of the order status and expected child support payments.

A co-located DCS staff person can also provide full access to all notes screens in DCS's Support Enforcement Management System (SEMS)[2]. While the majority of the CSO workers interviewed indicated that they rarely query SEMS if they are looking for information about the client (*e.g.*, to determine if the absent parent is living in the same household), some do. However, because of confidentiality issues related to the types of financial data that DCS can access, CSO staff can only access certain fields in SEMS. Having DCS co-located at the CSO provides CSO workers with ready access to the information contained on otherwise inaccessible SEMS screens.

Interviews with DCS and CSO staff indicated that the degree to which co-located DCS staff provide training to CSO workers varies by CSO. Some co-located staff will provide intermittent refreshers on the relationship between TANF and child support to CSO workers. However, in the majority of the offices visited that had a co-located DCS worker, little formal training occurs. Instead, informal interactions between the co-located DCS staff person and CSO employees served to increase awareness among TANF intake workers and case managers about steps they could take to improve the quality of information they obtained about absent parents.

In discussing the benefits of co-location, both CSO and DCS staff stressed the importance of having individuals who were motivated to be in this position. Because the co-located staff person has to balance a normal caseload with the duties associated with co-location, the position requires a high-performing staff person. In addition, much of the benefit derived from the co-location comes from the relationships that the DCS staffer can build with CSO staff and CSO clients. This requires an employee with a strong interest in maintaining these relationships and a commitment to remain in the position over a reasonable length of time.

Training

All CSO intake workers receive standard TANF training as part of a two-week module that also covers Food Stamps and Medicaid. While the training addresses the basics of child support, staff indicated that, because of limited time, it does not provide in-depth information about the relationship between child support and TANF, how to navigate SEMS screens, or the way in which DCS uses information collected by CSOs about the absent parent.

In addition to the basic state-provided training, individual CSOs are primarily responsible for providing further training on the NCP screen and the collection of information about the absent parent. Staff in two of the CSOs visited indicated that they did receive some additional training about the E-referral process when it

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[2] SEMS is the management information system for the child support enforcement program.

was first rolled out, but little follow-up has occurred since then. As noted above, co-located DCS workers in some CSOs have provided more formal training on E-referral processes to CSO staff. However, these trainings are the result of individual initiatives on the part of either a manager/supervisor in the CSO or the co-located DCS staff person.

Performance measures related to child support

Almost all the measures used to track CSO staff performance map directly to federal reporting requirements. Measures emphasize client participation rates, the number of open cases and cases needing action, and timeliness of case processing. None of the CSOs visited track the extent to which staff collect quality information about NCPs. CSO interviewees generally did not support the introduction of specific performance benchmarks in this area, largely because data collection for child support purposes is perceived to be outside of the agency's core mission and because staff can often do little to improve the quality of information provided by uncooperative clients.

On the other hand, almost all of the CSO supervisors and administrators interviewed suggested that it would be useful to receive information about how well staff are doing in terms of collecting information about NCPs. They indicated that they periodically hear from DCS that CSOs could be doing a better job of collecting information about absent parents, but they suggested that, without more specific information, it would be difficult to identify problems and improve.

CSO staff suggestions

Staff in several CSOs suggested more training for new intake workers and case managers would be worthwhile. Questions associated with child support can be quite sensitive, and these staff believed a better and more thorough explanation of the purpose for collecting the information and guidance on the best way to broach sensitive topics might yield more complete information.

CSO staff also asked for more guidance about identifying the most critical fields on the NCP screen. Staff are often pressed for time during intake interviews, and they are sometimes unsure about the relative importance of specific information (*e.g.*, the importance of an NCP's phone number relative to that of an address). Multiple interviewees suggested that if DCS could identify the three or four key fields that provided the most value to DCS caseworkers, CSO intake workers would be more diligent in ensuring that the information in these critical fields was accurate.

Finally, CSO workers vary substantially in their use of ACES comment screens. While most staff indicated the comment screens are useful to record information not captured in standard input fields, the additional information often goes unused because DCS has no easy way to access it or even discover that it's available.

DCS e-referral process

The project team met with SEMS programmers in the DCS central office and staff in five DCS regions. Interviews included office administrators as well as Support Enforcement Officers (SEOs) and Support Enforcement Technicians (SETs). The visits addressed e-referral processing as well as higher-level efforts to coordinate activities between DCS and the CSOs.

Automated processing of e-referral information

In a key system enhancement, SEMS staff deployed a routine that minimizes the number of e-referrals that require a manual intervention by DCS field staff. If SEMS receives e-referral information associated with an existing DCS case, SEMS *automatically* updates the existing case record, and the e-referral is not displayed to field staff. SEMS estimates about two-thirds of e-referrals pass through in this fashion.

Ironically, the automated bypass of good NCP information on existing cases may have inadvertently damaged the e-referral's reputation. With automation, DCS field staff ultimately process a much smaller share of TANF referrals than they did in the past, but the referrals processed manually are, unavoidably, much more likely to contain missing or bad information.

Manual processing of e-referral information

Each DCS field office dedicates significant staff resources to the review and processing of the third of e-referrals that require manual intervention. In some cases, one or two employees review all such referrals, directing them to the appropriate staff (*e.g.*, Support Enforcement Officers) for further investigation and processing. Some offices take other approaches. An office administrator may, for example, schedule each SET to process referrals during specified business hours. Alternatively, referral processing may be assigned a high priority with SETs expected to process referrals as they are able and to ensure a significant backlog never develops.

A key component of e-referral processing is cross-referencing several data sources and ensuring that, in establishing a new child support case, SEMS has the most up to date information from the various data sources available to DCS (*e.g.*, DOH vital records, Department of Licensing, Employment Security Department). Almost all employees interviewed begin processing an e-referral by searching for existing child support cases for the child or custodial parent associated with a referral. Typically, some member of the family is already in the DCS system (*e.g.*, the TANF applicant has another child for whom a child support case is already open). Automated SEMS processes attempt to match individuals associated with a referral to an existing DCS case, obviating the need for manual processing. But, because case information is often incomplete prior to paternity establishment, one of the initial steps for SETs is often to reconcile existing information in SEMS with the new data being transferred via the e-referral. This

may be a function of different spellings of the parent's or child's name or simply more current address information.

Following a search for existing cases in SEMS, the next step is typically to cross-reference the case with the DOH database. Often, even if the TANF case does not list an absent parent, paternity has been established via voluntary paternity acknowledgement and the absent parent is listed on the birth certificate. It is much easier to initiate a search for the absent parent using DOH data when the e-referral includes a valid SSN for the absent parent. Processing of e-referrals becomes much more time-consuming for those cases where the DOH cross-referencing does not yield a match.

Table 1, below, shows the average number of e-referrals processed per day for June 2008 in the Spokane DCS office. DCS staff report that the majority of e-referrals being processed are updates to existing cases. The numbers below are consistent with estimates provided by staff in other DCS offices. Although the volume fluctuates, most offices reported the flow of e-referrals as ranging from 20 to 60 per day.

Table 1: Average Number of E-Referrals Processed in June, 2008 – Spokane DCS Office

Total Number of E-Referrals in the Queue	30.6
Number of Days of the Oldest E-Referral	1.7
Number of New TANF E-Referrals	18.2
Number of New Medical E-Referrals	9.5
Total New E-Referrals	27.7

Source: Spokane field office, DCS

Conversations with DCS staff indicated that cases with multiple children and possibly multiple absent parents are far more time consuming to process. DCS staff indicated that, in addition to the difficulty in keeping track of multiple DCS cases for a single TANF applicant, the quality of the data provided by the CSO is often far worse for these cases. DCS staff suggested that often the e-referral will have just a single name for multiple children, even though it is often the case that there are multiple parents.

Quality of child support information

DCS staff provided a range of opinions regarding the quality of information about absent parents provided through the e-referral process. While some staff expressed frustration that the data from the NCP screen was often incomplete, most recognized that the CSOs do not see themselves as enforcement entities and were generally understanding of the potentially spotty information. Because of

concerns over data quality, every interviewee indicated that they check all of the information on an e-referral, even if it appears complete. As noted above, this includes cross-referencing the case with the DOH website and searching for existing information about the child or the parents in SEMS.

Veteran DCS staff members believe that TANF caseworkers frequently have important information about the NCP embedded in ACES. In many cases, the information simply does not get transferred to the e-referral form. In fact, one seasoned DCS manager, who has direct, online access to the ACES system, estimates that she finds important leads for about half of the referrals that come through as "NCP unknown." Sometimes these leads are hidden in case narratives, which are not transmitted with the referral. Other times, a referral may show only a name, but further investigation reveals the NCP was involved in a closed Medicaid case, which in turn reports a date of birth and SSN. The examples go on. The key to success in this stage is figuring out how to get TANF intake workers to investigate their information system more thoroughly.

During each meeting with DCS staff, the project team asked what key pieces of information would be most useful to receive from CSO staff. The most common response was the name of the NCP and, if possible, the SSN. DCS staff indicated that, while more information is typically better, they always double-check any information provided. If the CSO has provided information for many data fields, but the information is wrong, then establishing the case actually becomes more time-consuming. DCS staff reiterated that the quality of the information being transmitted is far more important than filling out all of the fields.

Aside from the name and SSN of the NCP, employment information is the next most sought-after field. Although this information does not necessarily aid in establishing the case more quickly, once paternity is established, an employer name and address can expedite order establishment and enforcement. Staff noted, however, that many of the NCPs change jobs often and employer information is often outdated).

Communication with CSOs

Most DCS workers do not have regular contact with CSOs regarding e-referrals. The typical perspective is that CSOs gather whatever information they can, but beyond this, DCS has the responsibility to pursue the information necessary to establish an order. It is very rare for a DCS worker to contact the CSOs for clarification or to seek further information about the data captured on the NCP screen.

Where they exist, DCS staff co-located in CSOs form a bridge between the two agencies. Administrators from both agencies attend planning meetings, but there have been few new initiatives in recent years. In addition, CSOs are a regular stop on the training tour for new DCS staff. However, both CSO supervisors and DCS workers indicated that, while these visits are useful in understanding the services that CSOs provide, the visits do not usually involve observation of intake interviews or discussion about the details of the TANF application process.

Direct communication between frontline DCS and CSO workers is rare, but certain conditions can trigger contact. For example, DCS may need to review a "good cause" exemption for TANF's child support cooperation requirement or confirm the living situation of the parents.

When asked about the accessibility of CSO workers, responses varied. In offices where they exist, co-located DCS workers serve as liaisons between the two agencies. In offices without co-location, DCS staff will attempt to either email or call the CSO financial worker or case manager responsible for the case in question. The formal channel for such inquiries is the 18-11 communication form. The majority of DCS workers interviewed indicated the 18-11 form was an ineffective means for initiating a query. These forms can be routed to the incorrect staff person, are often delayed, and frequently go unanswered. DCS workers indicated that it is usually more efficient to call or email the appropriate individual, despite DSHS directives to rely on the 18-11 form for such communications. Some DCS workers are former CSO financial workers or case managers. Those individuals stay in touch with their former colleagues in the CSOs, which makes informal communication, when necessary, even easier.

In some regions, DCS provides sporadic training to CSO employees. One DCS office was in the process of developing a training module to help CSO staff navigate the NCP screen. At other offices, co-located staff had provided presentations for CSO workers on the child support enforcement process. However, none of the CSOs visited indicated having received new training for at least the past couple of years.

Suggestions of DCS staff

A number of the DCS workers suggested that it might be beneficial for CSO workers to get a better perspective about how DCS uses the information collected during the TANF intake interview. Echoing the sentiments of some CSO workers, DCS staff felt that CSO intake workers do not understand the uses for, and importance of, the requested NCP information. This lessens the likelihood that intake workers will aggressively pursue quality information. Similarly, DCS staff indicated that it might be useful if CSO staff had better guidance as to what DCS believes to be the most important pieces of information about the NCP.

DCS staff also reported concerns about the quality of information contained in online applications. While the information obtained during in-person TANF intakes is not perfect, it is generally far better than the information submitted online or collected from call centers for medical-only cases. Much as some CSO staff felt that the presence of a paper form increased accountability compared to the new e-referral process, DCS staff suggested that the in-person interview resulted in far better information. Both DCS and CSO staff indicated that TANF intake workers in the CSOs typically have more experience and are quicker to develop the rapport with clients that ultimately produces better information.

Recommendations

Based on interviews with staff and observation of the e-referral process there are several potential areas for improvement.

- **Proceed with the automated interface with DOH**. Both DCS and CSO staff indicated that they use the DOH database to gather information about absent parents. Because almost all SETs double-check every data element provided on the e-referral, multiple individuals may be referencing the same information for any given case. This redundancy results from the fact that SETs do not, at present, know the accuracy of any given referral. An automated interface that draws down the necessary information from DOH would help ameliorate this redundancy and provide SETs with an assurance that referral data has been validated with DOH. Alternatively, some indicator on a case that the information entered on the NCP screen by the CSO staff was obtained from DOH might help to reduce this concern.

- **Identify the critical NCP fields**. CSO workers indicated that it would be useful to know which data fields on the NCP screen were most important to DCS. By having a better sense of the key data and how it is used, CSO intake workers may be able to probe more effectively and get DCS higher quality information. Although past training efforts have touched on these issues to varying degrees, it may be useful for DCS to convene more structured and regular trainings that reinforce these issues consistently across the state. Given the potential for turnover among CSO financial workers, annual trainings would serve to continually provide guidance to CSO workers.

- **Promote consistent use of ACES "notes" screens**. Although many CSO staff indicated that they collect potentially relevant information about the absent parent that is not captured on the NCP screen, there is no standard practice for where this information is entered. SETs do not search for this on a regular basis, in part because CSO use of the multiple ACES notes screens is not standardized. If DCS workers had a standard field to check (or an automated indicator noting when child support relevant notes were available) this information might be put to better use. This could be especially valuable in cases where pregnant mothers apply for TANF and CSO staff are not prompted to fill out the NCP screen.

- **Emphasize that no information may be better than information known to be wrong**. As noted above, SETs typically double-check all information provided on the e-referral. Although DCS wants as much information as possible about the absent parent, incorrect information ultimately makes paternity establishment more difficult. In addition to stressing key fields that help DCS in its locate function, DCS may also benefit from increased training of CSO staff that emphasizes the primacy of accurate information. This is particularly true in cases

where there are multiple children on the grant with different fathers. In these cases, DCS would rather intake workers simply enter "unknown" as opposed to entering the information about a single NCP when the CSO worker is reasonably sure that there are indeed multiple absent parents.

- **Refresh CSO understanding of the relationship between TANF and child support enforcement**. Although most CSO staff indicated that they had some understanding of the relationship between TANF and child support, there was often confusion about how exactly DCS used the NCP information. CSO financial workers and case managers may benefit from occasional refreshers that justify the data collection effort. Aside from helping them fill in the appropriate fields, the refreshers would leave staff better equipped to answer questions from clients about how child support will affect the grant amount and the implications of assigning rights and responsibilities to the state. In addition, if child support is presented to clients as a means of self-sufficiency, it may result in greater cooperation from previously hesitant applicants.

- **Considers specialized training for non-TANF intake workers**. Both CSO staff and DCS workers indicated that data quality is noticeably worse for non-TANF e-referrals. While medical-only cases still require assignment of child support rights, these applications are often processed over the phone via call centers. CSO staff indicated that call centers experience much higher turnover than do CSO field offices, and that call center staff have less experience in collecting information about absent parents. In addition, CSO staff felt that face-to-face interviews increase the sense of accountability on the part of the applicant and that applicants are more likely to provide limited or faulty information about the absent parent over the phone. Increased training for call center workers with an emphasis on collecting better information about the absent parent may improve the quality of medical-only e-referrals.

- **Improve communications to TANF applicants about non-cooperation sanctions**. A common refrain during interviews with CSO staff was that clients who are sanctioned for non-cooperation with DCS are typically unaware of the requirement to provide information about the absent parent and the fact that such non-cooperation results in a reduction of their TANF grant. Although CSO staff indicated that they always discuss this with new applicants, and clients receive several letters informing them of this responsibility before sanctions are initiated, the sanction process still suprises many clients. Resolving such confusion is straightforward in offices with a co-located DCS employee. However, if the case has already gone to the office of the prosecuting attorney, it takes more time to have sanctions lifted. Some of these situations might be avoided with more succinct explanations of the sanction process to new TANF applicants. For clients already inclined to provide information about the absent

parent, it may be possible to better ensure that they have ample opportunity and incentive to provide the relevant details.

- **Provide periodic feedback to CSOs about the relative quality and completeness of their e-referrals**. SEMS staff can produce office-by-office summaries of the share of e-referrals forwarded with incomplete or bad information about the non-custodial parent. Recent analyses suggest a wide variation in quality that socio-economic conditions alone do not appear to explain. Using SEMS data, DCS should develop performance benchmarks—tailored to the socioeconomic conditions of each office—and share them quarterly with each CSO.

Data Exchange Feasibility

Background

Washington's Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCS) routinely exchanges information with an array of public agencies and private entities. One of DCS's most important partners is the Department of Health (DOH), which stores key information about births, paternity, marriages, divorces, and deaths. This information can create the informational foundation of a child support case and, in many instances, is the key to timely and efficient enforcement. Because access to timely and accurate information is a critical component of an effective child support enforcement program, Washington Support Enforcement Officers (SEO)—like their counterparts in a number of other states—have online, real-time access to certain vital records information on a case-by-case basis. From the DCS perspective, the existing manual lookup process is, however, inefficient. An individual query may take 2-3 minutes and, across the state, staff makes hundreds of queries daily.

In August 2007, Washington secured an 1115 demonstration grant from the federal government to explore the feasibility of automating the case-by-case data exchanges already occurring between DCS and DOH. A key goal for the first year of the demonstration was to establish the feasibility of an automated data exchange between the two entities. Assuming the agencies could prove feasibility within the first year of the demonstration, the project would proceed to pilot implementation of the automated exchange.

To establish the feasibility of the automation, the agencies together had to ask and answer the following questions.

1. What information does DCS need access to and does DOH have legal authority to share it?

2. Can the two agencies develop a data transfer method that guarantees the security of transferred information?

3. Do the two agencies share enough common person-level identifiers on DCS case participants to reliably match information at the individual level? In other words, when DCS sends a query about an individual child, custodial parent, or non-custodial parent, can DCS provide DOH with enough data to allow DOH to determine, with a reasonable degree of certainty, whether the same individual exists in its database?

4. Do the agencies have sufficient computing capacity to accommodate nightly matches?

At the time of this report, technical staff in both agencies reported that automated and secure exchanges are technically feasible. Moreover, agency managers had

agreed to a list of DOH data elements of sufficient interest to DCS for the project to proceed.

Consistent with the data share agreement negotiated by DCS and DOH, the file exchanged as part of the feasibility study tested matching to birth record data only. The agencies still have to test the practicality of expanding the data transfer to include data from marriage, divorce, and death records. In addition, DCS and DOH still need to negotiate a price for the on-going data transfer of the matched data.

The following section describes how the two agencies worked together during November 2007–August 2008, and the subsequent sections outline their answers to the feasibility questions just described.

Overview of agency collaboration

Representatives from the two agencies first met in Fall 2007 with the goal of creating an interagency contract and data sharing agreement. Initial meetings involved more than 20 participants and included program managers, data security specialists, programming staff, and agency attorneys. Representatives of each agency offered their own boilerplate contractual language. Inconsistent terms and conditions slowed the process. Moreover, DOH, as a fee-based agency, required reimbursement for the programming time involved in the project.

DOH routinely negotiates data sharing agreements with other entities, although the agreements typically involve a "one-way" transfer of information. For example, researchers may ask DOH for a predefined extract of birth record data as a one-time request or on a regular schedule. According to DOH officials, negotiations surrounding the data sharing agreement for the demonstration were complicated because of the much less common "two-way" nature of the exchange—DCS desires to send DOH a file nightly to which DOH adds data before returning the augmented file to DCS. The novelty of the request required additional negotiating time for the two agencies.

A key to proceeding with the agreement was the development of a well-defined scope of work. Rather than address a full exchange of data and subsequent automatic case creation by DCS, the first contract between DCS and DOH focused narrowly on proving the feasibility of a secure and accurate data exchange involving DOH birth records. DCS and DOH would agree to the data elements, develop a method for secure transfer, exchange a test file, and examine the accuracy of the exchange. With a finite deliverable described, the two agencies executed a data sharing agreement and associated interagency contract on April 9, 2008.

Agreement on data elements

The agencies' agreement spells out the specific fields that DCS will send DOH and that DOH may return to DCS (see pages 8-13 in the Appendix A: Interlocal Datashare Agreement). In short, DCS sends DOH the relevant names, date of

birth, social security numbers, birth facilities, and birth cities for selected child support cases. DOH would return birth certificate information for children, and marriage, divorce, and death certificate information associated with adults on the child support case. To date, the agencies have discussed in depth only the birth certificate information. Because virtually all the data elements related to DOH birth certificates were already available to DCS via their existing online methods, extending the agreement to automated access was not controversial. That said, a handful of issues did arise.

- **DOH's inability to use a child's Social Security Number (SSN) to improve the accuracy of data matching**. The agencies agreed to match records based on the name, date of birth, and, if possible, SSNs of DCS case members. Using the SSN for matching purposes was deemed feasible for adults but not for children. While DOH explicitly collects and stores SSNs for adults as part of birth, marriage, divorce, and death certificates, the department does not formally collect SSNs of newly born children. However, through DOH's birth certificate process, parents can request a SSN for their newborn. DOH is then responsible for forwarding the request to the Social Security Administration (SSA). SSA then reports back to DOH all SSNs that were created based on their forwarded requests. DOH maintains a record of those newly created SSNs for auditing purposes only. Seeing a potential to improve the accuracy of matches, DCS requested that DOH use the child SSNs to supplement the match criteria, noting that this would *not* require DOH to return the child SSN to DCS. The DCS request was denied.

- **Suppression of data related to adopted children**. The agencies agreed that DOH would suppress the addresses of biological parents associated with adopted children. DOH would share the addresses of the adopting parents.

- **Lack of uniformity about "sealed" records.** DOH seals certain records if a release of information could put a party in harm's way (*e.g.*, releasing the address of a domestic violence victim). It became apparent to officials that the two agencies do not share a common standard on what constitutes physical harm. Officials agreed neither agency would forward information associated with cases that met their internal standards of violence.

Testing the accuracy of the data match

The datashare agreement called for the exchange of a test file that would be designed to explore the reliability of the matching process. The DCS-created test file contained almost 4,000 records. DCS programming staff stratified the records for testing purposes. They forwarded about 930 records for which DCS expected a DOH match (*e.g.*, cases in which a DCS enforcement officer had already made an online query about a Washington birth and for which detailed information about existed in DCS records). DCS programmers also forwarded numerous cases for which they expected no match (*e.g.*, children known to be born outside of Washington State). Finally, DCS created an intermediate group of cases with a

number of intentionally corrupted data elements. For example, programmers might slightly alter a child's last name to see if the programming logic could nonetheless identify a match through the child's birth date and parents' information. In this category, DCS included multiple copies of selected case records, each with a unique set of corrupted fields. DCS programmers designed the stratification to uncover if and where the match logic breaks down.

At the time of this report, a DOH programmer deemed the quality of the matching strong. She had identified only a handful of matches that countered DCS's expectations and expected that fine-tuning the programming logic to address the problem matches would be straightforward. On the DCS side, SEMS programmers had analyzed the data returned by DOH and subsequently engaged DOH programmers in multiple iterations of testing and refinement of the match logic.

Data security

Data security was the paramount concern of both agencies. During the development of the datasharing agreement, the agencies agreed to a nightly electronic exchange through the state's Secure File Transfer (SFT) process. Washington's Department of Information Services (DIS) offers the process to state agencies at no additional cost—the state's costs are distributed among all state agencies. DIS describes the process as follows:[3]

SFT is a secure way to move files between almost any two computers across open networks. The field-tested solution is based on the Tumbleweed Secure Transport product. The service is being used by several agencies to comply with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Users can connect to the service using a standard Web browser, SFTP client, RFC2228 compatible FTP client, or the Tumbleweed Secure Transport Client. Once connected, they upload the file that will be picked up later by the intended recipient. A transfer requires both an upload and a download. Depending on the client and the OS, the transfers can be fully automatic.

Several features make file transfers secure:

- **Encryption**: Data is encrypted when it travels over open networks. When the data is stored in the Secure File Transfer service, it is also encrypted.

- **Userid/Password**: Ensure all passwords are strong by using special characters and numbers.

- **Secure Data Repository**: Users can only see the file structures they are allowed to access. They cannot see directories that are higher in the hierarchical directory structure. Users cannot move into directories for other users.

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[3] The description of the SFT system and it security features were drawn directly from http://techmall.dis.wa.gov/services/secure_file_transfer.aspx (accessed August 25, 2008).

- **Server Hardening**: The Secure File Transfer service is hosted on computer platforms that are hardened to known risks.

- **Firewall Protection**: The service is protected by a dedicated network firewall.

- **Change Control**: Tripwire change control software used in this service detects and logs unauthorized software and changes to configuration files.

- **Customization**: DIS can customize processes to enhance security and functionality of the service depending on the business requirements.

- **Test Environment**: DIS can use a test environment to test file transfer processes.

- **Fulltime monitoring**: DIS monitors the service 24X7.

- **State Auditor Review**: The State Auditor reviewed the Secure File Transfer service and DIS has implemented the auditor's recommendations.

DOH capacity to match DCS records in a timely fashion

DCS is interested in matching two broad categories of information, and for each category, DCS has different needs on the timing of the match.

1. Flow of new TANF e-referrals. Data provided by DCS staff suggest the volume of new e-referrals is about 2,800 per month, statewide. New e-referrals would require nightly matching to expedite the paternity and order establishment processes. Assuming DCS sends all new e-referrals to DOH, the file would contain an average 130 cases per night—Monday through Friday. The nightly transfer could grow because DCS will want to resubmit e-referrals for cases with a likelihood of a change in status (*e.g.*, newborn children with a pending paternity). DOH officials indicate their servers could easily accommodate the workload even if nightly volume rose to three hundred records. In fact, DOH reports the test file, which consisted of almost 4,000 cases, required about two minutes of processing time. In short, DOH expects no capacity related issues for the nightly matches.

2. Stock of non-established or non-paying cases. In addition to expediting information transfer for the new e-referrals, DCS intends to mine the DOH database for NCPs associated with non-established or non-paying cases. For these cases, DCS will attempt to improve the quality of its information in a number of ways. Marriage or divorce records may indicate whether a child was born in- or outside of marriage and, consequently, determine whether paternity is at issue. Death certificate information could suspend locate efforts for some cases and potentially trigger claims against an NCP's estate, if one exists.

While the stock of non-established or non-paying cases is quite large, DCS would not forward all cases simultaneously. In fact, DCS has agreed that cases in this stock could be prioritized and submitted for matching over the course of a year. Even if these "stock" requests added 1,000 cases nightly, the submission would fall well within DOH's stated capacity.

Conclusions

At the time of report publication, DCS and DOH have answered most of the key questions related to the feasibility of automated data transfers. The two agencies successfully established a data sharing agreement and identified a secure method of sharing data. Moreover, DOH now understands the potential volume of DCS's matching needs and has concluded that reasonably structured requests would not tax their processing capacity.

The agencies have exchanged a test file limited to testing the feasibility of matching birth certificate records. While bugs in coding persist, programmers have completed multiple iterations of testing and refinement, and officials in each agency are confident they can make the match logic work with an acceptably high degree of accuracy. Given adequate resources, DOH and DCS officials expect that extending the match to include marriage, divorce, and death records will be straightforward.

Recommended Evaluation Study Design

Chapter 4

Introduction

This chapter outlines a robust research design and describes the data necessary for evaluating the key interventions planned for Washington's e-referral program under the 1115 demonstration grant:

1. Automated data matches with Department of Health (DOH) birth records

2. Training of CSO intake staff

While the interventions show the potential to improve enforcement for a wide range of case types, the *primary* impetus of the project is to strengthen the very initial stages of case setup for children newly joining the child support caseload. By improving the accuracy of referral data, the interventions should expedite identification and location of the non-custodial parents, thereby shortening the time to establishment and enforcement.

DCS intends to further improve case data accuracy by querying DOH marriage, divorce, and death databases. DCS and DOH have not worked out data-sharing agreements for these additional data exchanges, and we will address evaluation of the associated impacts in a future design memorandum. Because of differences in the type of data DCS hopes to glean from these additional databases, we anticipate a relatively simpler study design for evaluating the impact of adding additional automatic queries to the e-referral process.

Basic study design

In a January 2008 memorandum, we described several evaluation options, including both randomized-control and non-randomized study designs. This memorandum includes additional detail on the type study design recommended below. While a randomized-control design is always preferred when feasible, Washington DCS staff indicated that the method may not be possible to execute cleanly, could disrupt on-going work processes in child support field offices, and would be technically challenging to implement. We generally concur with the DCS opinion and have identified an alternative, pre-post study design that will produce reliable estimates of program impacts on key child support outcomes.

Specifically, we recommend that DCS implement automated DOH data matches and staff training in CSOs associated with four field offices. We will collect pre- and post-demonstration data on selected child support outcomes for all 10 DCS field offices. Using regression analysis, we will estimate whether the implementation of the automated DOH matching and the staff training had independent effects on any of the key evaluation outcomes identified in

subsequent sections detailing the methodology for estimating program impacts. To differentiate between the effects of the automated data match and those of CSO staff training, the study design requires staggered implementation of the two interventions. Ideally, DCS would implement the automated matches with DOH beginning no later than the week of January 5, 2009. Staff training would commence three months thereafter.

Field office selection

We recommend the Department implement automated data matches and CSO staff training in the CSO offices associated with four DCS regions: Everett, Kennewick, Spokane, and Tacoma. We understand that DCS's SEMS staff is already collaborating with field staff in Everett, Kennewick, and Spokane, and that staff in the Tacoma office have expressed interest in collaboration.

Ideally, the offices in which DCS pilots the interventions should demonstrate variation in performance that resembles that observed in the remaining six regions. This is indeed the case, as the CSOs associated with the four selected DCS field offices represent a range in e-referral quality, according to a SEMS analysis of e-referrals received over a forty-day period in 2007. The Spokane-area CSOs are top performers, submitting only 4.6 percent of e-referrals with bad (or no) information about the non-custodial parent. CSOs in the other three offices submit e-referrals with rates of bad or missing data that approximate or exceed the statewide average. The Kennewick CSOs send the highest share of referrals with problematic data—9.9 percent (see Table 2).

Table 2: SEMS Data Quality Analysis of E-Referrals

Field Office	Total E-Referrals from Associated CSOs	Number of E-Referrals with Bad (or No) Information about the Non-Custodial Parent	Percentage of E-Referrals with Bad (or No) Information about the Non-Custodial Parent
Everett	1423	126	8.9%
Kennewick	818	81	9.9%
Spokane	1362	61	4.6%
Tacoma	1759	161	9.2%
Six Remaining Offices	7281	636	8.7%

Source: DCS-SEMS

In addition, the performance of individual CSOs varies considerably. Among CSOs with more than 100 referrals during the 40 days period, the share of

referrals with bad or missing NCP data ranges from a low of 2.2 percent to a high of 14.5 percent. A handful of smaller CSOs exhibited either higher or lower rates.

Selecting field offices based on existing, or stated, willingness to cooperate with the central offices has its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the timeframe for the demonstration is relatively short and taking volunteers will expedite implementation and permit a longer period for observation of impacts. Moreover, currently collaborating offices may view the interventions as natural extensions of the existing pilot programs. On the other hand, findings from the volunteer offices may not reflect the impacts one would expect statewide because the offices—by stepping forward—have demonstrated a level of interest and energy that non-volunteering offices may not duplicate.

Although the resulting bias in the evaluation could tend in either direction, it is conceivable that DOH data matching would have a greater impact in "less enthusiastic" regions because the data match does not require additional effort at the field office level. The estimated impact of training may be overstated because ensuring success will require more intervention and follow-up on the part of DCS field staff. These lingering concerns result from the chosen study design. On balance, however, we conclude the time advantage is critical and that DCS should proceed with its volunteers and understand that any positive outcomes discovered in demonstration may not be fully replicated should they take the program statewide.

Evaluated outcomes

Both evaluation interventions seek to accomplish a similar goal: expedite the assembly of solid information about the identity and location of a non-custodial parent. The main difference in anticipated impacts lies in the point in the e-referral process where data improvements occur. Staff training will help CSO intake workers collect better information from clients and enter more complete information into ACES. Further downstream in the process, the automatic match with DOH will similarly improve the quantity and quality of NCP data available to DCS caseworkers *after* the e-referral is transmitted to DCS. Our evaluation will focus on a number of important child support outcomes for which we hypothesize improvement with more accurate and timely data. These outcomes should differ noticeably across the treatment and control offices if the demonstrated interventions have the hypothesized impacts, although the two interventions may differ in the extent to which they affect each outcome measure.

The automated matches with DOH birth and paternity information provides a low-cost method that should ensure DCS knows everything about a potential NCP that DOH knows. At the very minimum, the matches eliminate the need for Support Enforcement Technicians (SETs) to manually review the DOH database. In some cases, the matched DOH information should ultimately allow SEMS to automatically create and update cases—bypassing the SET altogether for a sizeable share of e-referrals. In other cases, the data match should correct incorrect information transmitted from ACES, allowing caseworkers to more efficiently locate the appropriate NCP.

CSO staff training should have a similar, but potentially broader, effect. All CSO intake workers have online access to the DOH paternity database. So in the *perfect* world, CSO trainees would always check the DOH database, and the subsequent automated data matching would become obsolete. However, perfect implementation rarely occurs, and the evaluation will seek to understand the extent to which CSOs fail to make full use of their online DOH access and the factors that drive this underutilization, including the impact of demographic characteristics on the performance of individual CSOs in sending DCS accurate information.

The training has additional potential well beyond the CSO staff use of specific DOH data elements. Trainees will learn the value, to DCS and their clients, of gleaning better upfront information about the NCP. A better understanding of the DCS mission and how DCS services improve the lives of CSO clients may result in more thorough probing about NCP information during CSO intake interviews More in-depth interviews should, in turn, improve the quality of paternity information DCS receives about the full range of children, including those born outside of Washington for whom DOH may have no data.

Beyond the upfront savings in staff time resulting from reduced need for manual casework and locate activities, the expedited assembly of accurate NCP information caused by the interventions may also possibly trigger a cascade of additional benefits. These may include expedited case openings, smaller arrears judgments at order establishment, and possibly higher compliance on cash orders resulting from smaller arrearages and earlier order establishments.

Specifically, we will attempt to measure intervention impacts on the following outcomes:

1. **Share of e-referrals that require manual SET intervention.** Better referral information, from either automation or CSO staff inquires, will decrease the proportion of e-referrals that require manual intervention. This will speed the average processing time for referrals. The demonstration interventions should *reduce* this outcome measure.

2. **Elapsed time from e-referral to case opening.** More complete NCP information increases the likelihood that the legal father will be identified within a given amount of time. This, in turn, increases the likelihood that an order is established within a given amount of time. The demonstration interventions should *reduce* this outcome measure.

3. **Elapsed time from e-referral to DCS-recognized paternity establishment.** For newly created cases, better NCP information will expedite formally recognized paternity establishment. The demonstration interventions should *reduce* this outcome measure.

4. **Elapsed time from e-referral to establishment of an order for current support.** Better NCP information will accelerate locate and order establishment processes for new cases. The demonstration interventions should *reduce* this outcome measure.

5. **Share of e-referral cases with paternity established through an administrative process.** More complete NCP information will increase the likelihood that paternity will be established before a case is referred to a prosecutor for judicial establishment. The demonstration interventions should *increase* this outcome measure.

6. **Share of e-referral cases with an order for current support established through an administrative process.** Expedited upfront casework on the NCP is likely to prevent some cases from entering the judicial order establishment process. The demonstration interventions should *increase* this outcome measure.

7. **Share of current support paid as due during the first six months after establishment.** Better upfront casework will accelerate paternity and order establishment, resulting in earlier collections, smaller accumulated amounts of arrears at the time of order establishment, and more frequent timely payments from NCPs. The demonstration interventions should *increase* this outcome measure.

8. **Average arrearage at the time an order is established.** Better NCP information will accelerate paternity and order establishment resulting in smaller accumulated amount of arrears at the time of order establishment. The demonstration interventions should *reduce* this outcome measure.

Data requirements

ECO will use the same set of data to evaluate the automated DOH matches and CSO staff training interventions. The majority of data would come from the existing DCS data warehouse; however, those data would need to be linked with ad hoc SEMS queries to provide detailed information about e-referrals.

TANF e-referrals would be at the center of our request. Each e-referral would then be linked (or not) to a IV-D case. We will ask DCS for a complete set of e-referral information and corresponding DCS case information from each of the 10 field offices dating from January 1, 2008 through the end of the demonstration period.

Data elements required from SEMS

To evaluate demonstration impacts on the outcome measures described above, we will need the following data elements from SEMS regarding each TANF e-referral transmitted since January 1, 2008.

1. Information assessing the completeness of NCP information contained in the referral (*e.g.*, NCP name present or missing, NCP SSN present or missing).

2. An indication as to whether referral required DCS human action/review.

3. Identification number (*e.g.*, relevant Basic Individual and Basic Case ID number)s that will allow matching to data from the data warehouse.

Data elements required from DCS data warehouse

We will match the e-referral data to numerous additional elements contained in the DCS data warehouse. Below, we provide a preliminary list of fields likely to aid the impact evaluation, although our specific data request will likely differ in some regards as we work out the details with DCS staff.

The Base Template

Fields from the base template will provide general case characteristics and demographic attributes of the CP and NCP. Relevant data elements include:

- IV-D number [IVD]

- Creation data [CREATDT]

- Case status [STATUS]

- Status date [STATUSDT]

- Case type [TYPE]

- Region [REGION]

- Prosecutor county FIPS code [PROSFIP]

- Field office [FO]

- CP cooperation status [COOP]

- Interstate type [ISTYPE]

- Interstate type date [ISTYPEDT]

- Prosecutor legal action type [PLATYPE]

- Enforcement service [ENFSVC]

- Enforcement service date [ENFDT]

- Hearing date [HEARDT]

- Effective orders [TEFFORD]

- Withhold indicator date [WHLDDT]

- Review status [RVSTAT]

- Review status date [RVSTATDT]

- Children needing paternity [PATCNT]

- NCP DOB [APDOB]

- NCP race/ethnic code [APETH]

- NCP Hispanic [APHISP]

- NCP gender [APSEX]

- NCP income [APINC]

- NCP income date [APINCDT]

- NCP zip code [ZIP]

- CP DOB [ARDOB]

- CP race/ethnic code [ARETH]

- CP Hispanic [ARHISP]

- CP gender [ARSEX]

- CP income [ARINC]

- CP income date [ARINCDT]

- CP zip code [ARZIP]

Case payment records

We will use case payment records to construct payment histories for NCPs identified in our sample of e-referral cases. We may rely more or less heavily on DCS calculated fields versus individual payment records depending on the reliability and applicability of specific data elements. At a minimum, our data request will include the following fields or additional fields calculated by DCS that are based on similar data (*e.g.*, data elements from CSE Case Snapshots):

- IV-D number [IVD]

- PMT_EFF_DT

- CURR_SUPPORT_DUE

- CURR_PAID

- ARR_BALANCE_AR

- ARR_PAID

Child Template

Data from the Child Template will provide demographic and paternity information for the children identified in the analysis sample of e-referrals:

- IV-D number [IVD]

- Child BI [CHBI]

- Paternity [CHPAT]

- Child race/ethnicity [CHETH]

- Child Hispanic [CHHISP]

- Sex [CHSEX]

- Child on order date [CHORDDT]

- Paternity affidavit signed [PATSGDT]

- Paternity not in question [NQUSTDT]

- Needs paternity [NDPATDT]

- Court ordered paternity date [COORDDT]

- Can't establish [CANTDT]

- Paternity affidavit established [ACKDT]

CSE Case Employee Role

Data identifying the nature and timing of CSE actions will allow us to construct a case timeline for cases linked to e-referrals in our analysis sample. Fields may include:

- IV-D number [IVD]

- CSECaseEmployeeRoleBeginingDate

- CSECaseEmployeeRoleEndingDate

- CSECaseEmployeeRoleTypeCode

Order

Information about established orders for cases linked to an e-referral is also critical to estimating intervention impacts. Requested fields may include:

- IV-D number [IVD]

- Order arrears amount [OrdAmtarrs]

- Order current amount [OrdAmtcurr]

- Order court code [OrdCourt]

- Order court date [OrdCourtdt]

- Order effective from [OrdFromdt]

- Order date [OrdOrddt]

- Order type [OrdOrdtype]