



## Improving outcomes in social services

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# Improving outcomes in social services

Web modernization and a user-driven focus can benefit clients and caseworkers alike.

**S**ocial services provide a vital safety net for a community's most vulnerable children, adults, and families. However, most social services agencies' websites and digital channels fall short when it comes to accessibility, user experience, and relevant, up-to-date content. Web modernization, which focuses on content efficiency, automation, self-service, and analytics, is an essential step to expand capacity and provide the timely, high-quality engagement that improves outcomes.

### Agency challenges

Social services agencies face a range of barriers to serving clients.

✔ **High staff vacancies.** Social services agencies have always struggled to recruit and retain staff. The wave of recent retirements and pandemic-related job burnout have driven vacancy rates even higher. The growing number of service delivery channels, including call centers and online transactions in

addition to in-person visits, requires new tools and staff skillsets.

✔ **Increased caseloads.** Programs such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are bracing for increased need as pandemic-era provisions wind down and cost of living soars.

✔ **Higher client expectations.** Clients expect seamless and personalized interactions with government agencies. They want agencies to provide the same range of high-quality communication options (including call centers and self-service digital tools) as private companies.

✔ **Difficult navigation.** Navigating different social services programs is still a daunting challenge for applicants. Program information is often expressed in government-focused language — if it is made available online at all. Siloed offerings make it

hard for residents to see the range of potential benefits available to them, especially wraparound services.

✔ **Need for equity and accessibility.** Social services organizations need videoconferencing capabilities, easy-to-navigate digital forms, and telephonic and digital signature capabilities so individuals can apply for benefits online or in virtual eligibility interviews. Furthermore, many organizations have not designed web applications and services for use on mobile devices and in multiple languages.

✔ **Overreliance on IT.** Existing platforms make it hard for content creators to publish information in real time. Even simple updates to websites and other digital channels often require intervention by IT teams, resulting in stagnant, agency-focused content rather than an engaging customer-focused experience.



### Illinois scales digital modernization solution to 35 agencies in two years

When the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) decided to modernize digital experiences and provide more equitable access for residents during the pandemic, it started with the state's Department of Public Health, Department of Employment Security, and a coronavirus response information website. Using Adobe Experience Cloud, Adobe Experience Manager, and Adobe Web Analytics, DoIT's efforts were so successful that in just two years, the state scaled the solution to optimize websites and mobile applications for 35 departments.

Initial agency sites have reported up to 63% increases in accessibility, while newly onboarded agencies have increased website traffic by an average of 25%.<sup>1</sup>

## Why web modernization matters

High-quality client engagement increases program participation and leads to better client outcomes. Web modernization frees up capacity for meaningful engagement and makes services more accessible, actionable, and personalized.

The following tactics are key to web modernization and building capacity:

### ✔ **Content efficiency/findability.**

Leverage user data from multiple channels to curate relevant content and provide intuitive experiences with little or no caseworker or contact center support. This includes improving search capabilities and navigation, streamlining content, using responsive design for mobile-ready content, and enabling content creators to update information across channels and devices without IT involvement.

### ✔ **Self-service/automation.**

Digitize and automate critical processes. Create intelligent contact centers that allow client self-service through interactive voice response, text messaging, and automation of forms and signature workflows.

✔ **Web analytics.** Capture and analyze website data for continuous improvement of navigation, accessibility, personalization, and efficiency. Understanding website performance across audience segments builds a holistic view of the client journey and the effectiveness of experiences.

## Getting started

The following best practices help social services agencies maximize their investment in web modernization.

✔ **Lead with discovery.** Identify client, worker, business, and IT pain



## Los Angeles County improves service and accessibility

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (LADPSS) is the nation's largest social services agency, serving 3.5 million clients. The agency needed to upgrade its text-heavy, difficult-to-navigate website. It didn't support smartphones or mobile traffic, and outdated technology made it difficult to create new content or update existing pages.

The agency partnered with Adobe to overhaul the website and introduce a dynamic, personalized, mobile-friendly experience that has transformed client interactions and reduced the need for in-person visits.

"We recognized that we had to stay a step ahead of customers and conform to the actual journey they are on," says LADPSS Assistant Director and CIO Michael Sylvester.<sup>2</sup> "The experience we deliver to them couldn't be based on our terms. It had to be based on their terms."

Using Adobe Experience Manager and other Adobe tools, LADPSS launched the new site in June 2020. The solution integrates with Amazon Web Services (AWS) Connect, an

intelligent contact center platform, to provide a seamless, engaging experience regardless of how clients choose to interact with the agency. The revamped site and contact center were vital to business continuity and service delivery in the early days of the pandemic.

"Instead of someone spending several hours to get an answer to a question, they could find the information they need on the site in just a few minutes — even over the weekend," Sylvester says.

LADPSS uses customer feedback and Adobe web analytics tools to continually improve web pages and processes. That has helped reduce the number of pages on the site from 600 to 200, making it easier to find essential content. Since March 2021, more than 2.5 million individuals have visited the redesigned website, freeing up caseworkers' time so they can focus on more complex cases. Given these successes, the agency is also working with Adobe to modernize its employee intranet.

**"The experience we deliver to [customers] couldn't be based on our terms. It had to be based on their terms."**

*Michael Sylvester, CIO, Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services*

points. Use those to prioritize goals, determine technology requirements, and choose the right solution.

✔ **Design with the user in mind.**

Focus on the experience of the user, whether that's a caseworker or a resident. Avoid legalese and technical jargon. Keep communications clear and effective. Human-centered design has been a key to success for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (LADPSS) web modernization, says Communications and Project Management Division Chief Elizabeth Becerra. "When visitors come now, they see a warm welcome, followed by clear navigation to the services we offer and benefit program descriptions that are written in plain language and easy to understand."

✔ **Maximize what workers can do.**

"There are two ways you can improve engagement," says Lauren Aaronson, a former deputy commissioner for New York City's Department of Social

## Cloud technology alleviates procurement and management burdens, **freeing up staff time for higher-value work** such as developing new applications for clients.

Services. "Hire and train more workers or free up your current staff's time by automating routine tasks." In her work as a human services transformation leader for Amazon Web Services, Aaronson recommends intelligent contact centers, automated document processing, and intranets that can surface valuable information quickly.

✔ **Transform training.** Incorporate continuous learning so staff can learn on the job. Use intranet modernization tools and self-service solutions to create on-demand, relevant, up-to-date content for each individual and their targeted skill set. Use web analytics to monitor progress and highlight areas where learners may be struggling.

✔ **Look to the cloud.** When built on state-of-the-art cloud technology, web modernization solutions enable IT and communications teams to deliver simple, seamless, and secure client and worker experiences at scale with less manual, duplicative effort. Cloud technology alleviates procurement and management burdens, freeing up staff time for higher-value work such as developing new applications for clients.

*This piece was written and produced by the Center for Digital Government Content Studio, with information and input from AWS and Adobe.*

1. <https://news.adobe.com/news/news-details/2022/Media-Alert-State-of-Illinois-Partners-With-Adobe-to-Power-Digital-Modernization-Delivers-Efficient-and-Accessible-Web-Experiences-to-Residents/default.aspx>
2. <https://business.adobe.com/customer-success-stories/ladpss-case-study>

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