



# Foundation for the Future

Modernizing  
Electronic  
Document  
Management  
Systems

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**I**n the time it takes you to read this paragraph, three things will happen. Someone will order a pizza to be delivered with a self-driving car.

Another person will open their front door to pick up a package that was dropped off by a drone. And the last person will electronically sign a Closing Disclosure for the house they've already toured and bid for online.

These are just a few examples of how technology has changed the way people can access modern conveniences. So, why can't they easily access economic assistance programs with the same types of tools?

Mobile apps, portals, process automation—agencies are actively testing these newer technologies

to help clients quickly access services, but they have yet to become the norm. In addition, these modern tools tend to get layered on top of stale technology infrastructure and manual, paper-based processes, which can ultimately have the opposite effect as intended and cause efficiency and client engagement to trend downward.

For human services agencies to truly meet their missions, innovation needs to happen from the ground up, starting with electronic document management systems (EDMS).

## The Evolution of EDMS

Most EDMS available to human services agencies have evolved, yet they still haven't quite kept pace with agencies' needs. We can use the Human Services Value Curve<sup>1</sup> (see Figure 1) to look at this evolution and the current opportunity it presents.








Initially, an EDMS was built to help agencies convert their paper files to digital ones that were scanned and stored for archival purposes once a case was closed. These Regulatory-level tools were very compliance driven but didn't help much in terms of increasing efficiency. Even when it became possible to retrieve files later, systems were built using complex folder structures that made information hard to quickly find and use.

Systems became more Collaborative as they added workflow and task management capabilities targeted toward streamlining key business processes so that caseworkers could focus more effort on clients. This is a step in the right direction, but still tends to cause friction in eligibility determination because these systems aren't yet configured specifically for the way caseworkers do their job.

Now, as agencies move their business models toward the Integrative and Generative levels, they recognize that technology must keep up. Case

## TOP DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT PROCESSES TO AUTOMATE

An EDMS that incorporates intelligent document processing, robotic process automation, and other emerging technologies can automate these manual processes that drain workers' time.

-  Classification of documents
-  Scanning in and routing mail to the right workstream
-  Extracting key-value pairs of data from print and handwritten material
-  Identifying and requesting missing verification documents or signatures
-  Extracting checkmark and multi-select data to guide upstream processes
-  Entering and updating client's demographic data into multiple systems
-  Updating addresses in multiple systems



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in point: GovTech Navigator's latest health and human services vertical report<sup>2</sup> says document management is one of the top three areas of increased importance for organizations in 2021.

Today, a modern EDMS can facilitate the information exchange necessary to help agencies move along the Value Curve. This type of tool empowers caseworkers not only to collect and store information, but also use it to help others. Since it pushes relevant information to caseworkers instead of forcing them to go out and look for it, they can eliminate redundant processes to focus on high-value, client-centric work. Here are a few examples:

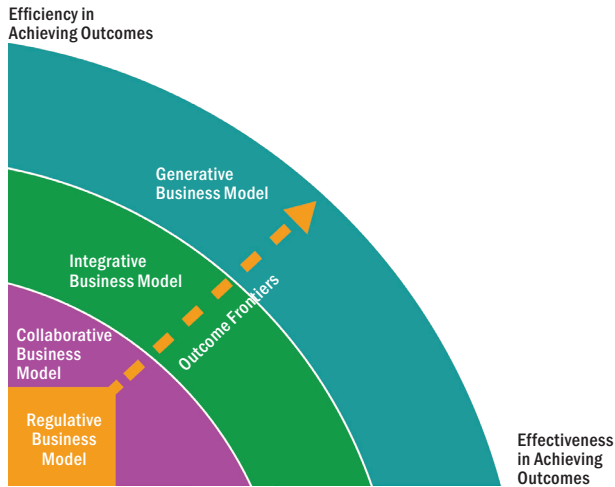
■ **Consolidate data from multiple points of entry.** An enhanced EDMS can pull data from various sources, such as the statewide eligibility

system, different drop-off mechanisms (e.g., mail, email or fax) or another document management system. This way, caseworkers don't have to waste precious time tracking it down themselves or sorting through different formats in which the data have come in.

■ **Automatically generate a list of missing documents for a case.** An advanced EDMS automates comparing the list of received documents with the list of required documents to generate a list of missing documents for each case, plus it prompts the caseworker to collect the missing ones. This means a caseworker processing a Medicaid application can immediately see whether the right proof of income is attached to ensure the case moves forward before the client loses



**Figure 1. Human Services Value Curve**



**Regulative Business Model:** The focus is on serving constituents who are eligible for particular services while complying with categorical policy and program regulations.

**Collaborative Business Model:** The focus is on supporting constituents in receiving all services for which they're eligible by working across agency and programmatic borders.

**Integrative Business Model:** The focus is on addressing the root causes of client needs and problems by coordinating and integrating services at an optimum level.

**Generative Business Model:** The focus is on generating healthy communities by co-creating solutions for multi-dimensional family and socioeconomic challenges and opportunities.

coverage. As a result, agencies are always in compliance and prepared to demonstrate that when it comes time to prep for an audit.

- **Speed up the processing of applications for benefits.** While many EDMS offer some form of workflow capabilities, the next-generation version will go beyond the basics to include things like to-do lists and activity templates to help caseworkers process applications within mandated timeframes. For example, caseworkers can quickly see a list of all required work for a case and easily determine what has been done already and what still needs to be completed.
- **Present information in the context of human services.** A taxonomy or electronic filing structure that's designed specifically for human services makes it easier for caseworkers to find the right information at the right time. Yet, it's lacking in many one-size-fits-all systems. This type of taxonomy considers the complex relationship between human services programs, making it easier for caseworkers across program types to access the right documents while maintaining necessary security protocols for cross-program information sharing.

### A Tale of Two Caseworkers

Let's explore this concept through the lens of two eligibility caseworkers, only one of whom is using a modern EDMS that's been purposely built for human services.

- Even if the first worker is using digital documents, they still have to review every application to ensure it has been signed and all the right boxes have been checked. Even cases with no changes, like an Aged, Blind, or Disabled Medicaid renewal, require redundant and manual work to process, which drains the worker's already limited time. If they also have to manually enter all the client's data from a form into the integrated eligibility system, there's a greater chance for making a mistake. All of this can delay clients from receiving the benefits they need, while increasing the chance for high error rates when the agency gets audited.
- On the other hand, the caseworker with a modern EDMS is not bogged down by redundant tasks. Their EDMS automates the processing of cases with no changes, as well as identifying and requesting missing signatures without any caseworkers having to get involved. This means they have more time to focus on the complex cases that require human attention and eligibility determination work, such as processing a Change in Circumstances report for a young couple receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits who are both taking on second jobs because they're expecting, which means their income levels will change and they need to add a new person to the case. This caseworker can serve more customers quickly and holistically

because they have extra time to learn the story behind a client's need for assistance.

What's the key difference between these two scenarios? There's more time to dig deeper and take action to help clients facing adversity. Not only does this improve caseworker morale, but it also benefits the agency because case files are more organized, data facilitate more accurate reporting, and caseworkers are able to complete applications within mandated timeframes.

### Foundation for the Future

Perhaps most important is that innovating from the ground up causes ripple effects that will have lasting impact on caseworkers and clients alike as they navigate the next normal.

- **Support a remote or hybrid workforce.** If the past year has taught us anything, it's that key work processes no longer need to be completed within agency walls. There's no going back to the way things were when your physical location mattered. In fact, recent data show<sup>3</sup> that 86 percent of state and local leaders agree remote work will be critical to agencies moving forward. A modern EDMS empowers caseworkers to securely access and manage clients' case files and information instantly, simultaneously, and from anywhere. And it gives leadership visibility into the caseworkers' workload.

*See EDMS on page 39*



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**Time at APHSA:** Seven months

**Life Before APHSA:** I joined APHSA with more than 14 years of experience in training and facilitation in the field of child support, curriculum design and development, leadership, and human services professional development. My experience includes delivering comprehensive trainings, facilitating peer networking and specialized workshops at the state, regional, and national levels.

Prior to joining APHSA, I was the Manager of Human Services Initiatives at the Institute for Families (IFF), Rutgers School of Social Work. In that capacity I, operationally and fiscally, was responsible for a training institute that provided comprehensive training, both synchronous and asynchronous, to more than 2,500 child support professionals in New Jersey. I also oversaw a leadership academy for managers and supervisors in health and human services funded by the New Jersey Department of Human Services.

**Priorities at APHSA:** To support and provide effective consultation and facilitation to members, project sites, and learning partners through building and sustaining agency capacity to advance organizational culture, execute effective service delivery, and build healthy and stronger families and communities.

**What I Can Do for Our Members:** I will collaborate and engage with APHSA's members and partners to achieve their agencies' goals and outcomes by using various customized tools, resources, toolkits, and frameworks supported by the Organizational Effectiveness team.

**Best Way to Reach Me:** I can be reached at [afigueroa@aphsa.org](mailto:afigueroa@aphsa.org).

**When Not Working:** I enjoy spending time with my husband and our dog, Mister West, as well as with family. I also enjoy traveling, especially overseas, while creating new memories with family and close friends.

**Motto to Live By:** "Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing." –Pelé 📌

## EDMS continued from page 19

■ **Manage workloads when waivers expire.** Waivers that have allowed flexibility from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic will expire with minimal notice when the public health emergency ends. Systems and processes will have to hold up when renewals return to regular operations and cause an immediate uptick in mail, online document submissions, and face-to-face document drop-off. A modern EDMS that streamlines application, renewal, and change processes will become even more valuable when caseworkers have to start working through a backlog of extended renewals on top of their already increasing caseloads.

■ **Prioritize clients' well-being.** An application on its own doesn't tell

the full story of how a family is doing and what other resources they need. When an EDMS can help move transactional and manual processes to the background, workers can focus on learning the client's whole story to identify all the resources they need and qualify for, not just what they initially requested. This also helps agencies work toward operating at the Generative level. If an EDMS holds program-level data, such as the number of people within a certain zip code or age range receiving certain benefits, caseworkers can be more proactive in offering the support each client is likely to need.

The need to modernize technology for economic assistance is immediate and

critical. Self-driving cars and delivery drones may not be the answer but caseworkers need Generative tools that afford them more time to provide holistic care to every individual who needs it.

A modern EDMS lays the foundation for fostering collaboration and information exchange so that caseworkers have everything they need to help clients keep moving forward on the path toward support and success. 📌

### Reference Notes

1. [https://aphsa.org/APHSA/Value\\_Curve\\_Toolkit/Toolkit\\_\\_Moving\\_through\\_the\\_Value\\_Curve\\_Stage.aspx](https://aphsa.org/APHSA/Value_Curve_Toolkit/Toolkit__Moving_through_the_Value_Curve_Stage.aspx)
2. "Health and Human Services (HHS) Vertical Report." GovTech Navigator and The Center for Digital Government. February 2021.
3. <https://www.govtech.com/navigator/data/Remote-Work-Critical-for-.html>