Quality and Productivity Commission

# 27th Annual Productivity and Quality Awards Program

*"Saluting County Excellence"*

## 2013 APPLICATION

Title of Project (Limited to 50 characters, including spaces, using Arial 12 point font):

**NAME OF PROJECT:** YourBenefitsNow! (YBN)

**DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION/ADOPTION:** FEBRUARY 2011
(Must have been implemented at least one year - on or before June 30, 2012)

**PROJECT STATUS:** X Ongoing _____ One-time only

**HAS YOUR DEPARTMENT PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED THIS PROJECT?** _____ Yes X No

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Describe the project in 15 lines or less using Arial 12 point font. Summarize the problem, solution, and benefits of the project in a clear and direct manner

The current economic challenges have created an influx of new individuals and families in the community of Los Angeles County, who now qualify for public assistance. This has caused significant increases in the quantity of applications received by the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) from community residents looking for financial, medical and food assistance. One solution to this critical business issue was to create a self-service website called YourBenefitsNow! (YBN). County residents have the ability to apply for assistance at any time and from any computer, tablet device or smart phone with internet access. YBN also provides the more than 2.5 million individuals in Los Angeles County, already receiving assistance, the ability to check information pertaining to their case 24/7, with real-time information. This has decreased the quantity of calls to our Customer Service Center.

YBN has offset the additional workload, while offering a more convenient way to apply for assistance. It has allowed DPSS to continue providing high quality services to an increasing population without a commensurate increase in staff.

| (1) ESTIMATED/ACTUAL ANNUAL COST AVOIDANCE | (2) ESTIMATED/ACTUAL ANNUAL COST SAVINGS | (3) ESTIMATED/ACTUAL ANNUAL REVENUE | (1) + (2) + (3) TOTAL ESTIMATED/ACTUAL BENEFIT | SERVICE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| $ 965,520 | $ | $ | $ 965,520 | X |

| | |
|---|---|
| **SUBMITTING DEPARTMENT NAME AND COMPLETE ADDRESS**<br>Department of Public Social Services<br>Eligibility Systems Division<br>12440 Imperial Highway, 3d Floor, Norwalk, CA 90650 | **TELEPHONE NUMBER**<br>(562) 908-8600 |
| **PROGRAM MANAGER'S NAME**<br>Hayward Gee | **TELEPHONE NUMBER**<br>(562)-484-7801<br>**EMAIL**<br>HaywardGee@dpss.lacounty.gov |
| **PRODUCTIVITY MANAGER'S NAME AND SIGNATURE** (PLEASE CALL (213) 893-0322 IF YOU DO NOT KNOW YOUR PRODUCTIVITY MANAGER'S NAME)<br>Nadia Mirzayans<br>**DATE** 07/02/13 | **TELEPHONE NUMBER**<br>(562)-908-8327<br>**EMAIL**<br>MichaelSylvester@dpss.lacounty.gov |
| **DEPARTMENT HEAD'S NAME AND SIGNATURE**<br>Sheryl L. Spiller<br>**DATE** 07/02/13 | **TELEPHONE NUMBER**<br>(562)-908-8383 |



*We Support Plain Language*

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**FACT SHEET – LIMITED TO 3 PAGES ONLY:** Describe the **Challenge, Solution, and Benefits** of the project, written in plain language. Include a discussion of the technology and linkage to the County Strategic Plan. The description should identify Performance Measures.

## CHALLENGE

The current economic times have created an influx of additional individuals and families in Los Angeles County, who now qualify for public assistance. This has caused significant increases in the quantity of applications received by DPSS from community residents looking for financial, medical and food assistance. The ability of line staff to efficiently move people through the eligibility process and provide key services to the residents of the community is critical to DPSS operations and adherence to strict federal and State timelines for application processing. Although there have been large increases in new applications, budget constraints have not allowed for increased staffing resources to handle the additional workload. The major business issue was to reduce the additional workload and also offer a more convenient way to apply for assistance to the community with a greater level of customer service, yet allow DPSS staff to continue to provide high quality services to an increasing population without increased resources.

## SOLUTION

Our solution to this critical business issue was to create a self-service website called YourBenefitsNow! (YBN). It was significantly enhanced in February 2011 and has received positive feedback from internal staff, advocates, and participants regarding the benefits that the self-service portal provides. It provides more than 2.5 million individuals in Los Angeles County, already receiving assistance, with the ability to check information pertaining to their case 24/7, with real time information. We are currently averaging over 125,000 participant visits to our website per month. The ability for them to look up information via the internet has resulted in a decrease in the amount of calls made to our Customer Service Center. It also allows individuals residing in the County to apply for assistance at any time and from any computer, tablet device or smart phone with internet access. Over 108,000 applications were submitted electronically over the last year. For many newly unemployed Los Angeles County residents, it may be the first time they are seeking public assistance. Utilizing our application process via the internet may eliminate some barriers and stigma associated with this process. The opportunity to apply electronically instead of walking into a district office has received very positive feedback from both residents and community partners who assist many individuals in navigating through the range of services available to them. It has also reduced the amount of time and resources spent to process the application information, because the information provided online is automatically inserted into the case management system and queued for DPSS staff to process.

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**BENEFITS**

DPSS is constantly looking for innovative ways to leverage technology to minimize costs and improve customer service to our community. Leveraging the availability of the internet to many of our residents and community partners, and enhancing our public website with more robust self-service functionality has reaped many benefits for our Department. The continually increasing usage of online self-service has significantly reduced the workload for our staff by eliminating the need for data entry in the online application process. Also, real time submissions allow our staff to immediately begin working that application for assistance when it's submitted electronically. This has streamlined new application processing. It has also provided a more convenient avenue for residents of the community to apply for benefits without traveling to a district office so that they can maintain their privacy. By having fewer clients applying in person, our office lobby traffic has decreased, along with client wait times, and our lobby staff is now able to focus valuable time on those clients who have special needs, or have a preference to apply in person. Community partners utilizing the website to assist residents in applying for benefits have stated how efficient the process has become, with many clients receiving notification within two to three days of eligibility, where manual submissions of hard copy applications can take up to four weeks for processing. The real time electronic submission of the application via the internet actually imports the application information directly into the DPSS case management system, which allows DPSS staff to process the information in a much shorter time frame. In addition, the website provides many "edits" to the data being captured online, thus ensuring more accurate information is collected from the residents, which also positively impacts the time required to process these applications.

Since February 2011, DPSS has received and processed over 108,000 applications submitted electronically via the internet. On average, the initial part of the intake process takes 30 minutes to complete via the traditional face-to-face interview process with DPSS intake staff. For online applications this process is eliminated. This alone has reduced the workload for intake clerks, and freed them up to focus on higher value work. In addition, the website received over 125,000 hits a month from participants seeking case information, current benefit amounts and access to their online notices of action. Overall, this project has been a great success for DPSS and the community we serve.

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**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN (DETAIL IS REQUIRED FOR COUNTY DEPARTMENTS):**

Strategic Plan Goal
1. Operational Effectiveness: Maximize the effectiveness of the processes, structure, and operations to support timely delivery of customer-oriented and efficient public services.

**COST AVOIDANCE, COST SAVINGS, AND REVENUE GENERATED (ESTIMATED BENEFIT):** If you are claiming cost benefits, include a calculation on this page. You must include an explanation of the County cost savings, cost avoidance or new revenue that matches the numbers in the box. Remember to keep your supporting documentation.

**Cost Avoidance**: Costs that are eliminated or not incurred as a result of program outcomes.

**Cost Savings**: A reduction or lessening of expenditures as a result of program outcomes.

**Revenue**: Increases in existing revenue streams or new revenue sources to the County as a result of program outcomes.

| (1) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED **ANNUAL** COST AVOIDANCE | (2) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED **ANNUAL** COST SAVINGS | (3) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED ANNUAL REVENUE | (1) + (2) + (3) TOTAL ANNUAL ACTUAL/ESTIMATED BENEFIT | SERVICE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **$ 965,520** | **$ 0** | **$ 0** | **$ 965,520** | X |

**ANNUAL = 12 MONTHS ONLY**

- It has been determined that there is a 30-minute savings in clerical staff time for data entry when clients submit the application electronically.
- Highest step pay for Intermediate Typist Clerk (ITC) = $3,110/ month
- $3,100 divided by an average of 173.33 hours' work per month = $17.88
- 50% of this hourly pay (the 30 minute savings referred to above) = $8.94
- $8.94 multiplied by an average of 108,000 applications a year = Annual cost avoidance of **$965,520**