

**County** Brunswick County  
**Department of Social Services**

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**Project Title** Triaging Needs to Improve Customer Service

**Category** Innovations in Services to Customers  
(Please select one)

### **Project Description and Summary**

**What did you do?**

**Describe your program or project. What did you do? What is the history behind the program/project? What did you hope to accomplish? What was your timeline? Your budget? How did you identify your objectives? How well did you use available resources?**

Similar to many counties, we struggled with developing a new business process with the roll out of NC FAST. Our timeliness and customer service suffered until we took the time to better understand how to improve our process with NC FAST. The way we conducted business no longer worked for us, therefore we were found ourselves at a crossroads, to continue with how we have always done it or identify a new method that would work for not only our customers but our staff as well.

While looking at our processes and studying staff and client needs. We learned that with the implementation of NC FAST we struggled to meet timelines and customer needs because it took so long to process applications, recertifications, and changes. Our ongoing IMC caseworkers were not responding to changes timely as they spent their time focusing on processing recerts. Our intake staff struggles with obtaining verifications once customers left the office which resulted in overdue applications. In addition, the Federal mandates were putting pressure on all counties to develop a new business process which would allow the county to not only meet timeliness guidelines but also maintain progress made.

We found that if job duties and functions were reassigned we could improve customer service while meeting federal and state mandates.

We reclassified an office support and two IMC II positions to income maintenance caseworker I and created a triage unit. The unit is comprised of 4 IMC I's and 2 IMC's.

When clients walk into our office to drop off changes, applications, or recertifications they are directed to the Triage unit. Here the IMC I's do one of the following tasks (1) react to changes, (2) hold interviews for FNS drop application/recerts, (3) assist with obtaining verification for changes, applications or recerts, (4) ensure voters registration forms are completed for all clients seen by this unit, (5) complete supportive functions to assist IMC II's such as property searches, verification of medical bills, etc.

The IMC II's assigned to this unit assist with the above, however their main responsibilities are to screen all drop off, mail-in and Epass FNS application for expedite processing. The triage unit IMC II's then process all expedite and late recertifications. In addition, they process all changes that may have a potential negative impact on the client.

Creating a unit which addressed time sensitive tasks allowed the other IMC's to focus on processing applications or recerts as well as responding to client needs in a timely manner thus providing better customer service.

Staff felt that the reassignment of tasks and functions from the caseworkers to the triage unit allowed them more time to focus on their customer's needs. Additionally, customer wait times have decreased as the Triage Unit staff are able to see clients as they walk in the door. Customers do not need to wait for their caseworker to finish what they are working on before being seen. This has also contributed to the decrease in our error rate as caseworkers are allowed to process with fewer interruptions.

### **Project Success and Impact**

#### **What was the outcome?**

**Was your program/project a success? What was the impact? How did you measure the impact? How widespread is the impact of your program/project? How were you able to overcome obstacles and challenges? Did your program/project meet your established objectives?**

The development of the Triage Unit created an overall net savings to the county as we reclassified 2 IMC II positions to IMC I positions.

The implementation of this unit took several months to ensure that Triage Unit staff were cross trained. IMC I rotate responsibly weekly to ensure that they remain proficient in all areas. Having identified staff to screen all drop off and epass FNS applications for expedite has allowed us to remain above the 95% USDA goals since implementation. From our reports, we are able to see that we are processing cases on the same day if able, but most importantly the interviews are completed when the client walks into our office. Applications are screened daily for expedite by specialist staff which helps decrease errors. Client's do not have long wait times which allows them to stay for the interview instead of just dropping off their paperwork. In addition, we are able improve management's span of control over expedite processing. We have been able to continue to meet Federal and State mandates without overloading staff which has improved accuracy, customer service, and staff morale.

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