

## Process Mapping: An Effective Tool for Improving Public Services

*“The process mapping was the single most important thing we did in this project. Creating the process map has allowed us to create a much more efficient and streamlined process.”*

*-Process Mapping Participant*

How did the work process in government become so cumbersome? As servants of the people government organizations must respond to new laws and regulations from policymakers, as well as to the concerns of other stakeholders, such as advocates. The usual response is a change in policy or a change in the work process. These changes often result in a system of workarounds. As laws change and efforts are made to address the concerns of key stakeholders and decision-makers, those who are responsible for doing the work can no longer remember why or how the process became so complicated. The work continues to be done, despite questions of why it

is done this way. The answer to those questions is that it has always been done this way. However, questions about the process should be a signal to management to pause, listen and become aware of the fact that it's time to take a look at the work process.

How do you deal with a process that generates more questions than answers or one that does not make sense? The Southern Institute on Children and Families (SICF) has found that value stream mapping and process mapping are excellent tools to revisit the purpose and goals of a process. Mapping a process gives a visual depiction of the process and creates a common vision and shared language for improving work.

### Why use process mapping?

Process mapping can provide a clearer understanding of the work process in order to identify opportunities for improvement. Significant improvements can be made to improve workflow by eliminating wasteful steps or consolidating steps in a process. SICF has led teams through process mapping exercises that revealed a need to improve customer service, improve or change policy and procedures, change the work environment or improve the worker/customer interface.

Beyond depicting the current state, process mapping is an excellent tool for creating a picture of the ideal process. Prior to designing major system upgrades or implementing new automated systems, process mapping can be used to redesign or streamline the business process to support the attainment of the overall goal when developing a new automated system.

Process mapping requires collaboration and teamwork, and promotes a deeper understanding across functional areas in an organization. Another important benefit is the communication that takes place among staff, allowing them to see how their roles intersect. This results in a better understanding of the responsibilities and contributions of each staff to the process.

### What is process mapping?

Process mapping is a picture of the work process. It visually displays the steps in a process for a clearer understanding of how the work flows or for identifying improvement opportunities in the process to reduce cycle time, avoid rework, prevent errors and reduce handoffs.

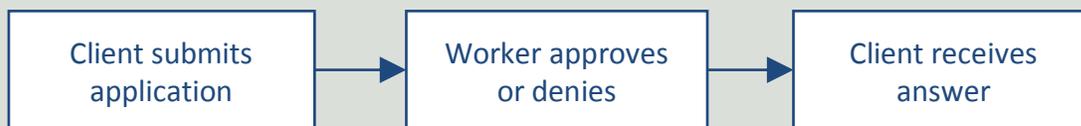
There are different types of process maps with varying levels of detail. A process map focuses on who does what, in what order and how long it takes. It shows when and where critical decisions are made. It represents the entire process from start to finish at a detailed level of observation, allowing for analysis to optimize the workflow.

Process mapping also involves data collection that is done during the mapping process and while improvements are being made. The data collected are the real power of the process map. A visual of the work process shows a sequence of steps, but capturing and tracking the data is what tells the true story.

A process map can be used to identify gaps between what is actually happening and what has been determined to be the ideal process. It is a work in progress used to track potential improvements in a process by providing visual representations of the process before and after the changes are implemented.

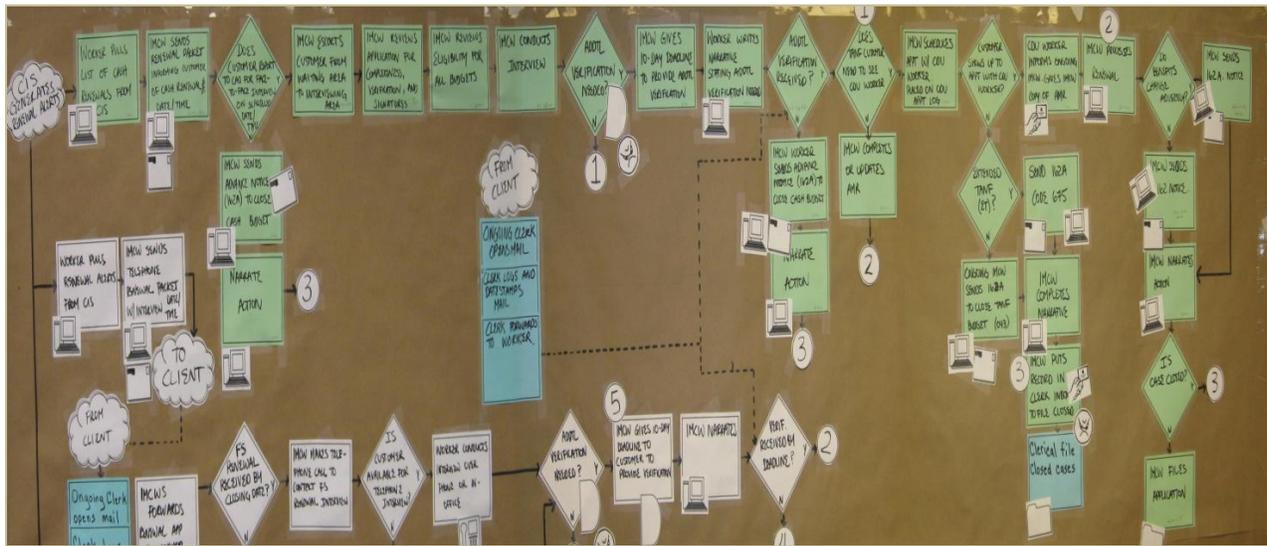
Figure 1 shows an example of the desired Medicaid and CHIP application and renewal processes, by the client and eligibility worker who want the most streamlined and accurate process possible.

**Figure 1: Desired Application Process**



However, rarely, if ever, is the process as simple as Figure 1 depicts. There are a number of steps, tasks and decisions that make up the application and renewal processes. It is more likely the application and renewal processes look like Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Actual Process Map Example**



Process mapping involves a number of phases including:

- Mapping the current process
- Analyzing the process map
- Creating a future state map
- Identifying and implementing changes to improve the process

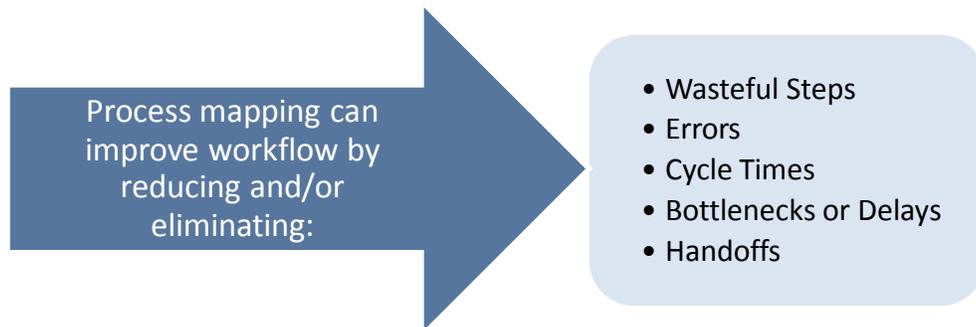
### What can be achieved using process mapping?

SICF has worked with a number of organizations to complete process maps that have led to significant improvements in their work processes.

- Florida achieved its goals to eliminate duplicative letters and improve effectiveness of correspondence. Sixty different letters were reduced to 19. The improvement outcomes resulted in cost savings to the Medicaid and CHIP programs by reducing paper, printing, postage, staff time and other resources.
- New Mexico data revealed a significant percentage of monthly renewal notices and other client communications were being returned as undeliverable due to incorrect addresses. New Mexico implemented several strategies to repair the problem, and as a result 64% of the returned mail was successfully delivered.
- Starting with process mapping, Oregon’s centralized eligibility processing unit successfully reduced the number of steps in their Medicaid eligibility determination process from 72 to eight.

- Child Protective Services in Hampton County, South Carolina reduced the number of repeat visits to in-home treatment cases due to clients not being available by scheduling a specific time for making the visits.
- Child Protective Services in Greenwood County, South Carolina began to staff all indicated investigations with the investigative worker, treatment worker, supervisors, and family members to streamline the transition to a treatment case and to meet policy with timely treatment plans.

**Figure 3: Process Mapping Improves Workflow**



SICF’s approach to process mapping can be applied successfully to a variety of processes used in the delivery of public services. With consultation from SICF, many state Medicaid and CHIP programs across the country have used process mapping to identify opportunities for improving their work processes. Process mapping has proven to be effective in helping staff diagnose challenges in the application and renewal processes for Medicaid and CHIP. Process mapping helps discover the actual performance of the system and identifies changes to implement that lead to improvements in the eligibility determination system.

Process mapping was a major diagnostic activity for the eight states that participated in the Retention Initiative, led by SICF and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Individual state teams collaborated with a large local eligibility office or a centralized statewide system in their state to map the renewal processes for both Medicaid and CHIP, as well as the coordination that occurs between the two programs. Analysis of the renewal processes enabled the state teams to pursue strategies that improved, streamlined and simplified the renewal processes for both the eligibility staff and the clients.

Process mapping can lead to needed changes for improving communication, following up on returned mail, reducing the need for clients to call and modifying basic office procedures to improve workflow.

In addition to working with Medicaid and CHIP programs, SICF has used process mapping to identify opportunities for improvement in child protective services. SICF successfully guided child protective service offices in mapping the work processes for case management in: intake, assessment/investigation, treatment, ex-parte, emergency protective custody and legal. The

results were used to diagnose the problems in the existing process and then test strategies to make improvements.

SICF's experience is that process mapping of child protective services, is a reliable diagnostic technique and an effective tool for improving case management. It is particularly powerful when coupled with analysis of performance data and case records review.

SICF has found that using process maps can lead to improvements in the alignment of case documentation requirements with data system and data entry capabilities. Process mapping also can help staff improve contacts with families and work more efficiently with other health and social services providers.

It is critical that representatives from all areas of an organization who are involved in a work process be involved in the development of the process map. It is important that each functional area understand the potential impact of suggested changes in a process.

Process mapping can be used on its own or incorporated into a more comprehensive process improvement effort. It is effective in a number of public service settings. Certainly process mapping should be employed to streamline the work process before investing in new automation and data systems. Ensuring that the "right" process is being used rather than automating an ineffective process is the ideal investment.

*"Process mapping gives you a chance to view your county process in each area. It lets you see the big picture of how each area operates and the role, quantity of work, bottlenecks, challenges and policy in each area. It helps with understanding how each worker works. I think this map should be used in training new workers. It is a whole lot easier to understand and better to comprehend."*

*- Local Social Service Agency  
Staff Member*

## Acknowledgements

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The Southern Institute on Children and Families is non-profit organization dedicated to improving the well-being of children and families, especially those who are economically disadvantaged. We create opportunities to meet basic needs through achievement of innovative, research-based policies, effective policy implementation and efficient service delivery. In pursuit of these goals, we generate knowledge and build leadership that result in action.

The Process Improvement Center was created by the Southern Institute on Children and Families to utilize quality improvement theories and principles to assist customers in improving the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of processes within public programs that support lower-income children and families, with a focus on eligibility services.

## Additional Information

For additional information on process mapping and SICF's process improvement services contact:

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