

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

Project Title: Expand New York State myBenefits portal to Increase the Demand for Broadband by Low-Income Families

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

This project will improve broadband adoption rate for low-income families through the expansion and deployment of Internet-facing functionalities that will provide public access to pre-screen, apply for, and manage activities associated with health and human services benefits including health insurance/Medicaid programs, cash assistance programs, Food Stamp, child care, and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program without requiring onsite face-to-face interviews.

According to the 2009 Pew Research Center study, low-income families (making \$30,000 or less) have a broadband adoption rate of less than 50%. The same report also cites that the reasons low-income families chose not to have broadband at home are relevance (50%), price (19%), availability (17%) and usability (13%). This project will address issues associated with relevance and usability.

New York State launched myBenefits, a citizen portal, in May 2008. It is currently processing about 15,000 transactions a month with over 40% of its traffic coming from non-governmental entities. Excellent user experience was demonstrated with 100% site uptime since December 2008 and less than 10% abandonment rate. A pre-screening transaction can be completed in less than 10 minutes. This demonstrated that broadband can be an efficient, client-centric benefits delivery channel, and that myBenefits is a proven platform to build on. Both the 211 organization and the NYS Library Association have also offered to assist individuals with accessing and using myBenefits. Over time we expect these partnerships will further increase the usage of myBenefits through broadband.

At the end of August, we will be launching myWorkspace, a companion worker portal to myBenefits, to allow case workers to process applications and manage workload more efficiently, thereby providing more responsive services to applications/inquiries made by clients through myBenefits. We believe this will further enhance the client's experience and make broadband the method of choice for residents across New York State to access benefits.

Both applications are developed in Java with Open Source components such as Struts, Hibernate and Drools Rules Engine. This approach allows for rapid development and deployment to meet a dynamic business environment. The first release of myBenefits was done in 17 weeks. It does not contain commercially-licensed components and is free to share with other state government entities. In fact, an earlier version of myBenefits was transferred to the State of New Mexico.

The current caseload data for the programs affected by this project are in the table below. The number of cases reflects the estimated number of potential broadband subscribers which could be in the millions.

Program	Cases	Recipients
Medicaid	2,811,856	4,319,324
Food Stamps	1,267,045	2,384,027
Temporary Federal Assistance	110,940	247,510
State Temporary Assistance	163,934	163,934
HEAP	1,506,464	N/A

This project will also facilitate the placement of kiosks in local social service lobbies, where the public can access the myBenefits site to learn about numerous programs across several State agencies, self-screen their potential eligibility for these programs, apply or recertify online for Food Stamp benefits and other programs, check their benefits/budgets and submit required documentation through scanning.

OTDA's qualifications to implement this project are well established. OTDA is the New York State agency responsible for the administrative management and oversight of the federal and state programs for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamp), cash assistance, Welfare to Work, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Homeless Programs, Refugee Assistance, and New York State's Supplemental Security Income (SSI) supplementation program. OTDA has the organizational capacity to manage and implement this project and is the lead agency working in conjunction with the New York State Chief Information Officer and the Office for Technology.

This request seeks \$8.8M in federal BTOP funding for April 2010 through October 2011.

State funding for this project is in place through March, 2010. However, State funding for the State Fiscal Year beginning April 2010 and for subsequent years is not yet budgeted. This budgeting gap puts this highly innovative project at risk for completion. Receipt of this grant funding will ensure the completion of this project.

The jobs created by this project will consist of positions created by the systems integrator for application development. OTDA estimates the creation of 10-15 application developers, 2 application architects, 1 project manager, and 1 project manager assistant.