

# **Santa Clara County's Central Client Service Model**

## ***Recommendations for Contra Costa County***

**ROXANE FOSTER**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Santa Clara County Social Services Agency has embarked on an exciting workflow structure: the Central Client Service (CCS) model. This changes the workflow process from a case-based model to a task-based model. Although many counties have used call centers for their Medi-Cal and CalFresh field (continuing) case management systems, the workflow change is a fundamental shift from traditional intake processes. Historically, intake for benefits programs (e.g., CalWORKS, CalFresh, and Medi-Cal), required applicants to make several office visits to apply for benefits, complete the intake appointment, and provide the required verifications. Workload was managed in a "Case to Worker" paradigm. The CCS Model utilizes task management workflows and tools to move away from the one-worker-to-one-case concept and leverage technology to increase efficiencies.

The focus of this project is on the "optimized lobby process" which is one facet of the overall Central Client Service implementation. I observed the use of technology and new streamlined reception and application processes that resulted in the ability

to process larger amounts of work without the need to increase staffing. I applied the concept of using separate Eligibility Support and Application Support functions to three business units under my span of control, and discovered that the business units easily fall into these support functions.

Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department already has most of the technology pieces available to implement this proposal immediately. The Medi-Cal Service Center and Medi-Cal Mail-In Unit use an automated call distribution system. Applications received via the Internet, telephone and postal mail are processed using existing technology. Additionally, the department is in the preliminary stages of detailing the business requirements for a centralized appointment scheduling system.

Using the existing telephone systems, Internet access systems, and other virtual office tools, the Centralized Application Process can quickly become the forerunner to the department's "office of the future."

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### **Introduction**

The Great Recession ushered in a new challenge for California's counties. They are trying to balance an increased demand for services with diminishing resources. Most county social service offices have witnessed large increases in applications for programs that offer immediate relief, including applications for CalFresh (formerly known as Food Stamps), CalWORKS (CW), and Medi-Cal (MC). Higher demand for services has resulted in long wait-times for applicants; increased workloads; application processing backlogs; lower staff morale; and increased overtime costs. Consequently, the public has been dissatisfied.

Located at the southern end of the San Francisco Bay Area, Santa Clara County is the most populated county in the Bay Area region. The U.S. Census estimated that the county's was 1,764,499 in 2008. Santa Clara County experienced a jump of 6.3% in their unemployment rate between 2007 and 2010. The Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA) saw applications for MC, CW and CalFresh more than double between October of 2007 and October of 2010. To further complicate matters, there are several other environmental issues: California and her counties have received increased pressure from the United States Department of Agriculture to increase CalFresh participation rates and compliance with timely Expedited CalFresh determinations, and there has been political support for the privatization of benefit programs and/or the moving of MC eligibility to the state.

Santa Clara County SSA responded to increased applications, the need to meet Expedited CalFresh determination compliance, and the need to increase CalFresh participation rates by offering overtime to staff. Although the agency was generous with over-

time, they were still unable to keep up with the demand for services and make the needed compliance improvements.

The problem that Santa Clara faced was simple: how to provide acceptable service levels with diminishing resources. In order to solve the problem, the agency embarked upon changes in several of their business processes. The overall process, called the Central Client Services (CCS) model, incorporates business workflow changes into the intake and field functions. The premise of the model is to change processes from a case-based to a task-based workflow. Although many counties have used call centers for their MC and CalFresh field (continuing) case management systems, the change is a fundamental shift from traditional intake workflow processes. Historically, intake for benefits programs (e.g., CW, CalFresh and MC), required the applicant to take multiple steps including several visits to the office to apply for benefits, complete the intake appointments and provide required verifications. Workload was managed in a "Case-to-Worker" paradigm. The CCS model utilizes task management workflows and tools to move away from the one worker to one case concept and leverage technology to increase efficiencies.

Implementation of the new business model will occur in the four steps shown in Table 1, next page.

The project is scheduled to take 18 months from planning starting in April, 2010, to final implementation in October, 2011. As my BASSC project occurred early in the implementation process, I narrowed my focus to review the Optimized Lobby Process that was implemented in February, 2011. I visited the main office at 1919 Senter in San Jose and viewed the new lobby process, including the self-serve kiosks and the assisted-help BCW workstations.

**TABLE 1**  
**Implementation of the Business Model**

<b>Step 1</b>	Detailed Business Requirements	Gather detailed business requirements for technologies that support Step 2 and Step 3.
<b>Step 2</b>	Optimized Lobby Process	Streamline lobby flow through a navigator station and self check-in. Use a Task Management Tool that supports check-in to the point of being called to a reception window. Create self-service Benefits CalWIN, (BCW). Support Automated Call Distribution System (ACD). Schedule for lobby support.
<b>Step 3</b>	Point of Entry Integrated Document Management with Full Task Management Tool Support	Develop paperless application and verification processing. Outline phone and non-phone scheduling. use end-to-end task-based application processing
<b>Step 4</b>	Central Client Service	Transition CalWORKs Continuing, GA/CAPI, Foster Care-CalWORKs, GA and Foster Care to Service Center model.

From the point that I entered the building, I was visually guided to the self-help kiosks. I observed the touch screen monitors and noted that self-serve help appeared to be user-friendly. It was the obvious first step in a client's lobby experience. DEBS Manager, Hilda Friedman, demonstrated use of the touch screens at the self-help kiosk. The information entered into the touch screen was processed to a printed ticket for the user and a back-end ticket that monitored the progress of the new task. The physical ticket directed me to use the BCW workstations to file an application for CalFresh or MC. After observing the lobby process, I was introduced to the back-end process where the Interactive Document Management (IDM) process occurs. In the near future, installation of self help-scanners in the lobby will link to IDM system and generate a ticket to monitor the progress of the task.

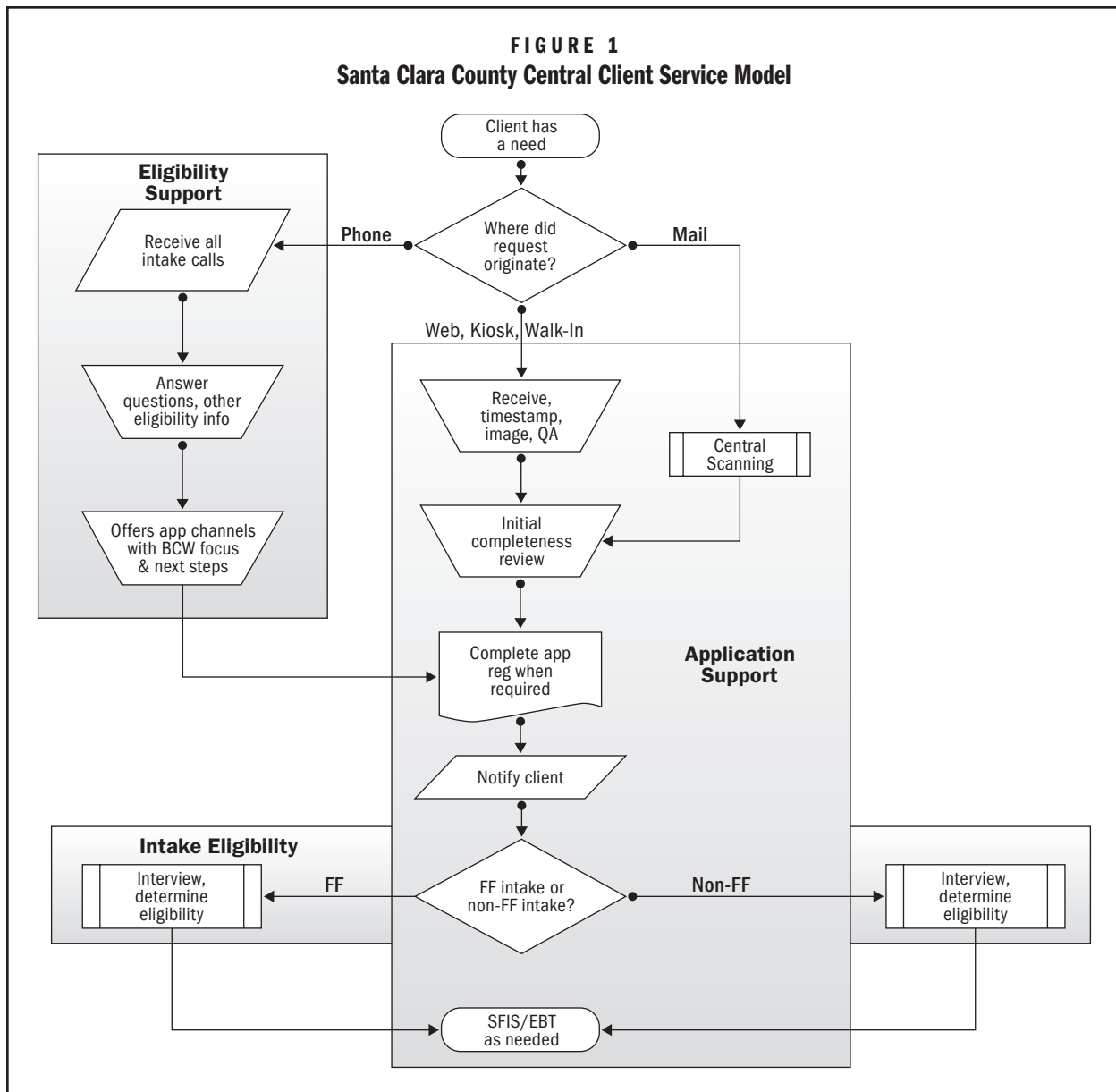
The new model offers increased multiple access points for applying for benefits, from self-help and assisted-help to a task-based work distribution system. Access points to applying for benefits include the Internet, interactive voice response telephony, the mail, and walking in to an office. Self-help is enabled through the kiosks in the district office lobby. Assisted-help is available through Internet application systems in the district office reception area where agency staff are available to assist applicants.

Eligibility workers will be utilized to manage the Eligibility Support function and the processing of case-related tasks. The tasks will be assigned to the eligibility workers using the task management tool. Coverage for the phone function will be scheduled using the automated workforce scheduler.

The Optimized Lobby Process includes the following key components:

- Use of multiple channels of access for all inquiries
- Separation of Phone, Eligibility Support and Application Support
- Use of technology, including:
  - Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) & call review
  - Interactive Voice Response (IVR)
  - Phone workforce management and scheduling for ACD phone work
  - Task Management Assignment tool
  - Scheduling for non-phone activities
  - Self-service lobby check-in and display
  - Self-service BCW workstations for lobby
  - Workforce management tool for lobby and back office
  - Integrated Document Management System for capture and retrieval

See Figure 1 for details.



In the first four weeks of the project launch, Santa Clara County SSA had over 12,300 self-service lobby check-in and display usages in their offices across the county. The number of BCW applications doubled when compared to the six weeks prior to the launch. The Task Management Tool and Snap-Scheduler (workforce scheduler) were functioning as planned.

The goals for the new business process are that application interviews will be conducted within 24 hours or less from receipt of the application, and that

final eligibility determinations will be made in 24 hours or less from the receipt of the verifications. As a result of the new Optimized Lobby Process, applicants spend less time waiting to be seen by reception and eligibility workers, and they are able to file their applications more effectively. For Santa Clara County SSA, demand for services has not diminished, but by using the new business process and supporting technology, the agency is better able to streamline workload, effectively deploy staff, and come close to its 24-hour goals. The final results will

be seen once implementation of the entire model is complete. I believe that the improvements will exceed the desired goals and prove that counties can provide services more effectively than the private sector.

### **Lessons for Contra Costa County**

The Great Recession has been particularly hard for Contra Costa County. With one of the highest foreclosure rates in the nation, the county has experienced a massive drop in property tax revenue over a short period of time. Rising unemployment rates in the county have undoubtedly contributed to an increase in the number of applications received for income maintenance programs. Application counts more than doubled for some programs between October, 2008, and October, 2010. The department was forced to lay off staff in December, 2008, because of county budget cuts. Since that time, the department has been able to avoid layoffs, but has not been able to increase staffing to a level that can support the increase in applications. At the same time, the department has lost a large number of senior staff to retirement. Contra Costa County faces the same environmental pressures experienced by Santa Clara County SSA: increased pressure from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to increase CalFresh participation rates and timely compliance with Expedited CalFresh determinations, as well as political support for the privatization of benefit programs and/or the moving of MC eligibility to the state.

### **Recommendations**

Meeting increased demands with decreasing resources is a problem faced by all California counties, and Contra Costa is no exception. The Employment and Human Services Department has taken steps to address the large increase in applications and to meet federal timeliness requirements through the implementation of group intake sessions for the CalFresh program in most of their offices. Groups are scheduled for between one and eight times per week, depending upon the demand at the site. As a result of this process, EHSD can now offer CalFresh appointments as quickly as the day following the date

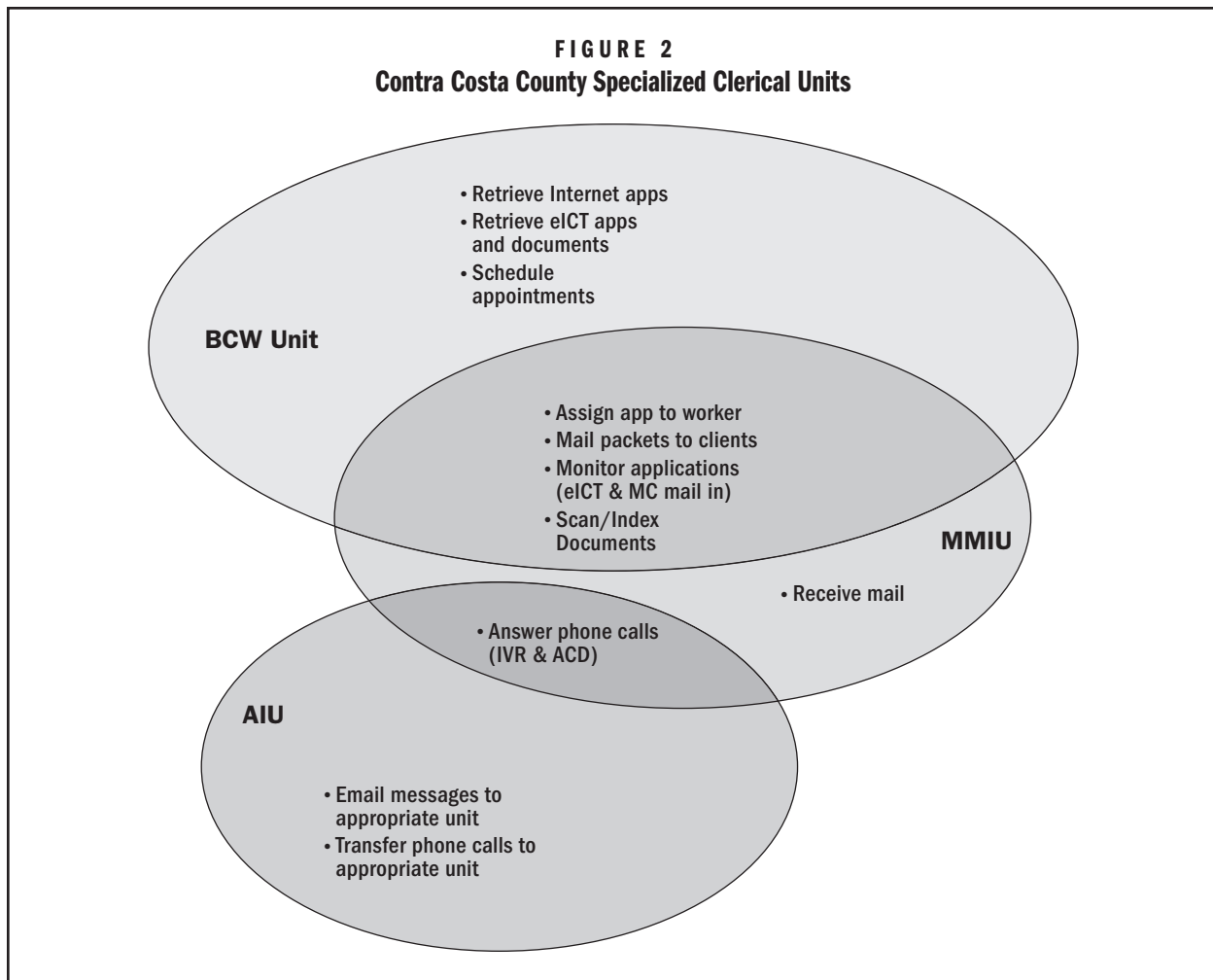
of application. Although this is an improvement, the department is aware that streamlining business processes to improve efficiency, and ultimately increase overall client satisfaction, are needed.

To that end, EHSD is in the process of exploring a new business model that is similar to Santa Clara County's CCS model. The Contra Costa County project is in its initial planning stages and will require an investment of twelve to eighteen months for implementation. In an effort to begin making improvements in the intake process during the project-planning period, I recommend the use of the Santa Clara Lobby Optimization system as a model for streamlining workflows and using technology support. Over time, three clerical business units under my span of control have developed overlapping functions. I propose merging the duplicative functions of the units and redefining the structure to more closely resemble the Lobby Optimization model used in Santa Clara County. The new Central Application Processing (CAP) model will interface with district office reception units.

The Benefits CalWIN unit is primarily concerned with the clerical function of processing applications received via the web. These functions include appointment scheduling, assigning applications, monitoring eICT applications, and converting and transferring eDocuments.

The Medi-Cal Mail-In unit (MMIU) is responsible for administering the department's toll-free MC application telephone system. The unit processes MC applications that are received via multiple sources, including via telephone, postal mail, single point-of-entry, web referrals from the BCW unit, and walk-in MC applications that are referred from the district office receptions. In addition, they process follow-up documentation received from applicants and monitor new cases to ensure the MC Statement of Facts is returned to the department. Finally, the MMIU acts as the department's central MC application distribution point using the department's workload balancing tool.

The ACCESS Information unit (AIU) responds to callers who need assistance in the department's In-



teractive Voice Response telephone system. The staff assist and refer callers to appropriate resources. The AIU also forwards messages from callers to individual workers and supervisors, as needed. (See Figure 2.)

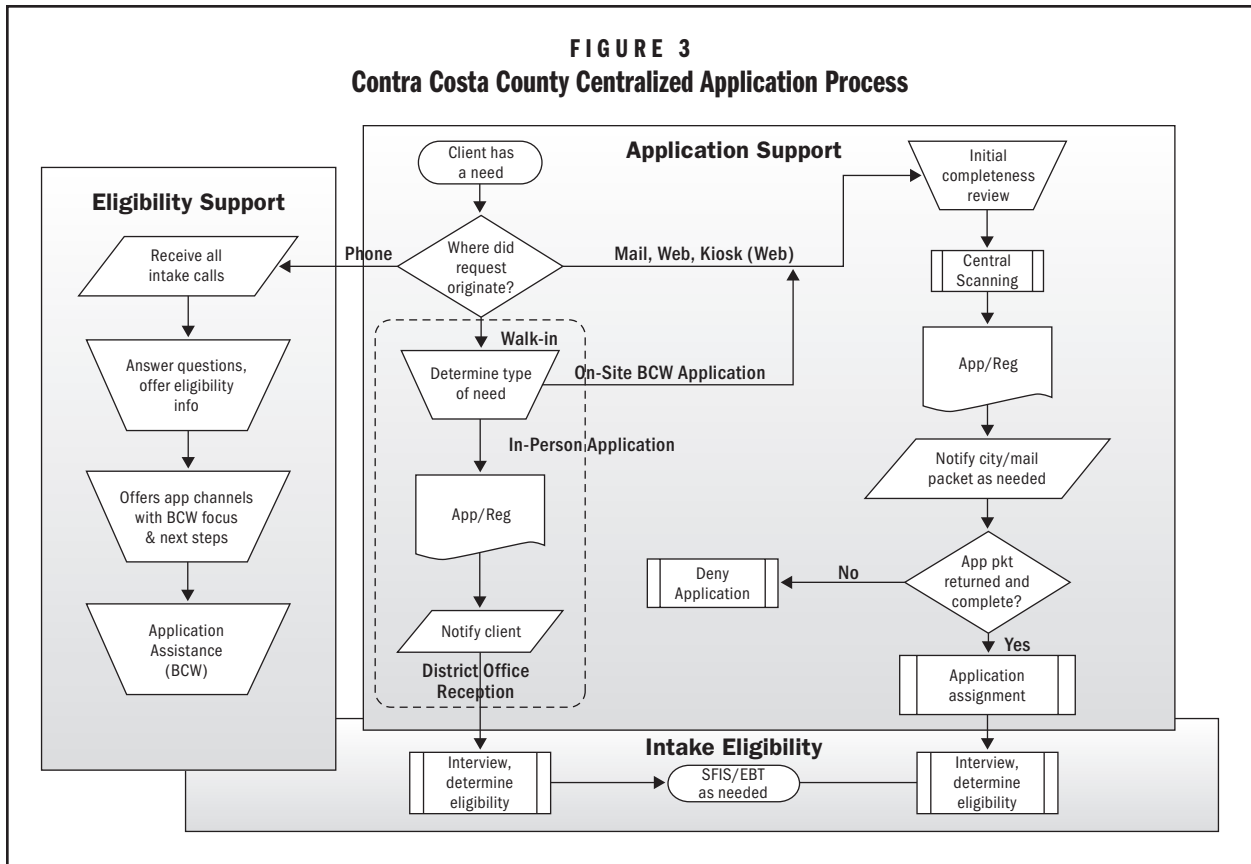
Observation of the increased efficiency in Santa Clara that was gained by restructuring their points of access at their reception and their lobby brings me to the recommendation to restructure the BCW, AIS and MMIU to more closely align with the concept of Eligibility Support and Applications Support.

Eligibility Support will utilize an existing ACD system and connect to the IVR system to receive telephone calls. These calls will focus on issues that the IVR system cannot resolve, Medi-Cal application questions and requests, and general reception telephone inquiries. The Eligibility Support function will also offer additional application channels for

callers including BCW, mail-in applications, and telephone applications, if appropriate.

Application Support will be at the heart of Centralized Application Processing. This function will be responsible for the clerical processing of applications received via the web, mail, and telephone (via the Eligibility Support function); for monitoring eICT's and eDocuments; and for scheduling intake appointments and assigning intakes to workers. The MC applications will continue to be assigned to all MC eligibility workers in the county using the department's workload balancing tool.

Some of the technology needed to implement CAP is already in use at the department. The ACD system is currently being used by the MMIU and can be expanded to incorporate calls received via the separate IVR system. EHSD has a workforce scheduling



system that is used by the Medi-Cal Service Center, which may have the capacity to include scheduling for Eligibility Support. Eligibility Support can use the web application Benefits CalWIN and the department’s online self-screening tool when filing applications taken over the telephone.

In order to better utilize CAP, EHSD will need to procure a department-wide appointment scheduling system that can be accessed by Eligibility Support, Application Support and District office receptions. Additional enhancements to the current document imaging system would be helpful to speed up the transfer of documents between functions.

**Eligibility and Application Support in the Centralized Application Process**

See Figure 3 for details.

**Conclusion**

Santa Clara County’s new business process uses proven task management workflows in nontraditional settings. The agency’s streamlined lobby process appears to be a success. Although Contra Costa County is in the planning stages of changing its business processes, there are tactics being used in Santa Clara County that can be quickly implemented in Contra Costa. The investments of new technology and resources for CAP are relatively small and should result in increased efficiencies for the majority of new applications. Implementation of CAP will result in prudent use of the department’s resources and positive results for applicants.



## Acknowledgements

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## Resources

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