Issue Brief

Controlling Paper:

How Enterprise Content Management Helps Manage Caseloads, Cut Costs and Improve Services for Housing and HHS Agencies

Fiscal challenges continue to impact public housing authorities (PHA) and health and human services (HHS) agencies. These agencies are finding their workforce stretched to the limit as constituent demand for services continues to increase. The number of Americans receiving assistance from programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid and HUD Section 8 is at an all-time high,[1,2,3] and the growth in public aid recipients adds even more documents to the caseworker's pile.

The weight of paperwork is already bringing PHA and HHS agencies to a breaking point. Documents are the core of eligibility and re-certification for most programs. Employees waste valuable office hours tracking down, updating and filing documents. Applicants, who need immediate aid, spend too much time preparing repetitive submissions for multiple agencies or waiting for eligibility decisions.

Technology can help. In difficult financial times, innovation can often take a backseat to simply getting the job done. But by implementing an enterprise content management (ECM) solution, PHA and HHS agencies can better manage their skyrocketing caseload, in spite of dwindling resources, by better controlling their documents. ECM helps them serve the growing number of beneficiaries more efficiently, more personally and at a lower cost.

This issue brief will describe how ECM can improve document management in PHA and HHS agencies and identify some key criteria for investing in an ECM solution.

What is ECM?

ECM is software that can help agencies capture and share content that is the basis of most eligibility application processes. Content managed by ECM can include paper and scanned documents, electronic forms, emails, data streams or even screenshots.

PHA and HHS agencies use ECM applications in conjunction with existing case management systems to simplify the capturing; archiving; finding; filing; and sharing of beneficiary documents, records and electronic forms. ECM connects case management applications and databases to a central document repository. This critical step links documents with data. Instead of working back and forth between a case management system and paper files, caseworkers can retrieve information by clicking on a field in their case management system. Electronic versions of key documents are available in seconds.

Benefits of ECM

PHA and HHS agencies can use ECM to simplify routine document-related tasks, eliminate the costs and time associated with paper-based processes and storage, and improve beneficiary services.

- **Eliminate low-value tasks** — The Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) used ECM to eliminate low-value staff tasks, such as locating, pulling, completing and re-filing daily case work for attorneys. This led to files being found 60 times faster, even though the department lost 40 percent of its staff due to budget cuts.[4]
- **Reduce paper** — All documents received at OCSS are scanned immediately and stored digitally, providing attorneys and auditors with self-service access to files from agency computers. With a few exceptions (such as original birth certificates), paper is no longer retained.[5]
- **Improve service delivery** — The Lucas County, Ohio, Department of Jobs and Family Services (JFS) increased the rate of client intake by integrating ECM with a self-service kiosk. Public wait times dropped from 40-60 minutes to 10-15 minutes.[6]
- **Cut costs** — The Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA) tripled employee productivity by decreasing document retrieval time from between 3 and 12 minutes to between one and three seconds — a 237 percent improvement. It also freed up 1,000 square feet in office space. In total, CHFA saved $1 million annually.[7]
- **Simplify the audit process** — CHFA must comply with strict document retention policies to meet multiple mandates. ECM enables the agency to sort and organize documents and manages retention requirements. It reduced audit preparation from several days to two hours.[8]
- **Comply with security mandates** — The Housing Authority of the County of Alameda (HACA) in California had to comply with stricter HUD tenant confidentiality requirements. Yet documentation was stored in multiple unsecure locations. HACA's ECM system now protects confidential tenant information in a central digital archive with an audit trail that tracks access.[9]
- **Enable self-service and mobile options** — ECM technology can serve as a gateway to self-service kiosks and mobile applications. The Marion County, Ind., Department of Health leveraged its ECM solution to divert non-critical customer traffic from employees to a self-service kiosk.[10]

Best Practices for ECM Selection and Deployment

Think enterprise, not niche. Start by choosing an enterprise-wide system. Niche systems only integrate with a specific department or database. A lot of database products have "add-on" document management systems that are inexpensive and convenient, but they lack advanced functionality that enables true cost and time savings.

ECM solutions connect multiple assistance programs and case management systems, enabling agencies to treat an applicant to multiple programs as a single entity by creating a "common core" of documents that can be used by each program. The common document core can be used to determine eligibility for any agency program and improve customer service delivery by eliminating repetitive application completion.

Require multiple deployment options. ECM can be delivered as an on-premise software solution, a cloud-based, hosted Software as a Service (SaaS) offering, or a hybrid solution that contains both on-premise and SaaS components. Hosted solutions have lower entry costs and IT expertise requirements because they are managed and maintained by the ECM vendor. If agency IT resources are thin, a hosted offering is a good option.

A hosted solution complements the ECM strategy because it can be deployed in phases. It provides an affordable entry point and the ability to expand to the enterprise, sustainably. Begin with the program that has the greatest number of applicants and move others online over time by adding seat licenses. Hosted solutions can be moved on-premise in the future, if needed.

Insist on simple integration. Easy integration between the ECM and case management applications can only be accomplished if using an ECM solution that doesn't require custom code (which requires additional professional services that can dramatically increase total cost of ownership) for the integration. This is extremely important — every time a law or mandate changes requiring a case management system update, the integration between the ECM solution and the case management application may be altered and need to be re-integrated.

Start with intake. Many PHA and HHS agencies find it easiest to begin an ECM implementation with document capture at intake, then connect those documents to the case management system. From there, begin to automate processes to speed up eligibility decisions and annual reviews. As the agency reclaims its budget resources and staff time, review the possibility of more advanced options such as self-service kiosks for client check-in or non-confidential document copies.

Learning curves should be flat. Heavy caseloads don't allow employees the luxury of a lengthy training process and prolonged ramp-up period. ECM should extend its functionality into the existing case management application, providing easy, intuitive retrieval of documents from within the system's already-familiar user interface.

Capture is more than scanning. The ECM solution should be able to capture documents in multiple formats (such as paper, e-forms, screenshots, etc.). It must accommodate variable volume jobs, regardless of input volume. Documents captured in disparate locations should be available in the same repository to facilitate sharing, eliminate physically transporting paper and remove the possibility of in-transit document loss.

Robust tools are critical. The ECM solution should provide a variety of tools to store, organize and track content. Look for the ability to:

- Manage content according to established business rules (e.g., privacy, security and retention)
- Preserve and protect documents to comply with standards
- Automate redaction to protect confidential information
- Apply content checklists to digital files and notify staff when documentation is missing
- Create an audit trail that shows when the document was captured, reviewed or changed
- Assign role-based permissions to access, change or review documents

Endnotes

1.   "Food stamp use rises to record 45.8 million," CNNMoney, http://money.cnn.com/2011/08/04/pf/food_stamps_record_high/index.htm
2.   "Medicaid Enrollment: December 2010 Data Snapshot," The Kaiser Foundation on Medicaid and the Uninsured, http://www.kff.org/medicaid/enrollmentreports.cfm
3.   "Out of Reach," National Low Income Housing Coalition, http://nlihc.org/oor/oor2011/introduction.pdf
4.   "Agency does more with less. Cases filed, found 60 times faster, despite 40% staff reduction," http://www.hyland.com/Documents/udi/CaseStudy/CS_CS_RIOCSS75.pdf
5.   Ibid.
6.   "Better, Faster Public Service," Government Technology, http://www.hyland.com/Documents/udi/CaseStudy/CS_LucasCountycasestudy-Fina77.pdf
7.   "Faster document access saves housing and finance authority $1 million yearly," http://www.hyland.com/Documents/udi/CaseStudy/CS_CHFA_Case_Study174.pdf
8.   Ibid.
9.   "Housing Authority cuts re-exam cycle times, speeds audits, protects tenant information," http://www.hyland.com/Documents/udi/CaseStudy/CS_Housing_Authority_Alamed297.pdf
10. "Marion County, Ind. Deploys Birth Certificate Kiosk," Government Technology, http://www.govtech.com/e-government/Marion-County-Ind-Deploys-Birth-Certificate.html

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