



# The Computerworld Honors Program

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## Final Copy of Case Study

**LOCATION:**  
*Harrisburg, PA, US*

**ORGANIZATION:**  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Public Welfare

**YEAR:**  
*2011*

**ORGANIZATION URL:**  
<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us>

**STATUS:**  
*Laureate*

**PROJECT NAME:**  
COMPASS

**CATEGORY:**  
*Human Services*

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

PA COMPASS (Common Point of Access for Social Services) is an integrated, web-based, multi-lingual self-service tool that provides customers a greater hand in receiving and managing social service benefits. The Pennsylvania COMPASS solution enables citizens to determine if they are potentially eligible for various health, financial, and nutrition services, check the status of their benefits through individual accounts, apply for benefits for up to thirteen (13) programs via an online application, and report changes to their information. COMPASS also enables community partners to assist clients in applying for, maintaining, and renewing their benefits. Originally made available in 2001, COMPASS has continued to evolve and establish the standard upon which other self-service integrated benefit management is measured. The most recent upgrade to the solution, in June 2010 has focused on transforming the solution into an immersive, engaging user experience aimed at increasing the usage from 25% to 75% of applications submitted each month. The online application can be viewed at: <http://www.compass.state.pa.us>. A screenshot of the application has also been provided in APPENDIX 1. Technological Innovation COMPASS uses the most recent advances in user interface and enterprise service integration technologies to collect and electronically share data with the appropriate case management systems. The June 2010 enhancements include the use of Rich Internet Application Technology using the Flash Player and Flex Development framework as well as an agile rules-based processing architecture, supported by Corticon Business Rules Engine. Through industry standards-based data sharing formats, a case worker using one of the five (5) systems to which data is sent can electronically processes this information. This results in significantly reducing paper-based processes and manual data entry. The COMPASS infrastructure is secured using the Commonwealth's enterprise security solution for single sign-on. This allows users to use their MyCOMPASS account to do business with other Commonwealth agencies that use the enterprise security solution, such as the Department of Labor and Industry, which manages the Workforce Development System in support of TANF work participation programs.

Service Integration COMPASS has been made possible through the collaborative efforts of four (4) Commonwealth agencies, including the Departments of Public Welfare, Aging, Insurance, and Education throughout the evolution of COMPASS. It now serves as the single front door for users to get information about programs offered by various agencies within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. For example, the 'Do I Qualify' capability of COMPASS evaluates users for these agencies' programs, such as SNAP, Medical Assistance, Child Care, National School Lunch Program, Cash Assistance, and other financial and healthcare programs. In addition, potential benefits related to tax credits and the Low Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program are evaluated. Most importantly, it provides links to additional information about how and where to apply for these benefits.

## **SOCIETAL BENEFITS**

This innovative use of technology provides a solution to a challenge experienced by all states in the US: the challenge of increasing citizen accessibility to social services and making the transactions between citizens and state agencies as efficient and user-friendly as possible.

## **PREVIOUS PROJECT UPDATED/EXPANDED?**

The June 2010 implementation of COMPASS was a major upgrade to the system. This update combined three major activities to support the Department's vision of a one-stop citizen-facing self service application and the OIM Modern Office Initiative. The primary goals for this upgrade included: Improving Business Functionality, Upgrading the Technology Platform, and Simplifying the COMPASS Application Language and user experience.

- Improving Business Functionality • Provide online renewals with data pre-populated for both citizens and Community Partners • Updating the screening module to simplify the process and reduce the time required • Allowing for online accounts to check benefit status and report changes • Creating self-registration for Community Partners and DPW business partners
- Upgrading the Technology Platform The user-centered design approach and rich user experience are facilitated by a set of various technologies that are linked by the Department's Service Oriented Architecture: • Rich Internet Application Technology using the Flash Player and Flex Development framework • A robust Business Application Layer using the Microsoft .NET 3.5 Framework • An agile rules-based processing architecture, supported by Corticon • Security & Privacy using SiteMinder and SOA Security Manager
- Simplifying the COMPASS Application Language • The COMPASS application language as a whole was revised, with the majority of text simplified to a 5th grade reading level based upon various readability standards. Question consolidation and reorganization was also completed as part of the user-centered design.

## **PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION COMPLETE?**

Yes

## **PROJECT BENEFIT EXAMPLE**

COMPASS enhances coordination and cooperation between the Commonwealth, local agencies, National School Lunch Program providers, and community based organizations by allowing organizations such as health care providers, schools, faith-based agencies, health insurance companies, and other community based agencies to apply for and help facilitate the overall enrollment process. Enabling Health Care Reform This innovative tool also supported the rapid creation of a web-portal for the Pennsylvania Insurance Department to support uninsured adults with pre-existing conditions in response to Health Care Reform legislature. This has provided the citizens of Pennsylvania the ability to apply online for transitional



insurance coverage until the broader coverage provisions of federal health insurance reform come to fruition in January 2014. The application can be initiated from <http://www.pafaircare.com/> Results Since its implementation in 2001, COMPASS has become increasingly popular and positioned as a valuable outreach tool for the Commonwealth. It has helped increase program participation by raising awareness about potential eligibility and encouraging new applications. Pennsylvania's innovative use of technology in the COMPASS Self-Service Solution has delivered the following positive results:

- Increase Number of Applications Submitted Online. A user-centric design makes applying online easier for the citizen.
- Increase Understanding of Available Benefits and Services. Many citizens are not aware of all services that are available. The screening tool helps promote awareness by screening for all programs.
- Reduce Foot Traffic in County Offices. Citizens have fewer reasons to visit the office. They can apply, renew and report changes online.
- Reduce Number of Calls to the County Offices. Workers can focus on more critical tasks related to issuing benefits and maintaining case information.
- Provide More Responsive Service to the Citizens. Citizens can quickly check the status of their application or current benefits at any time of the day with a few clicks, instead of phone calls.
- Empower Citizens by Offering Self-Service. Citizens benefit from the ability to apply, renew, or report changes at any time of the day, giving them flexibility around work and family schedules.
- Discard Paper Trails for Improved Organization and Efficiency in Processing Applications in a Timely Manner. Electronic applications are immediately routed to the caseworker best suited to process the application expeditiously, based on their skill set and availability.
- Reduce the Amount of Time Needed to Fill Out Applications. Much of the feedback from prior versions of COMPASS focused on the time and complexity in completing an application. Fewer questions and simplified language directly targeted resolving this issue. 'Do I Qualify' now processes 20,000-30,000 self-screenings a month. 'Apply for Benefits' and 'Renew My Benefits' has supported as many as 60,000 applications per month throughout the past year. Each month, approximately 35,000 citizens access their accounts to check on their benefits and submit online changes to case workers. It is anticipated that utilization will increase further as a result of the most recent usability and technology improvements. The continued success of COMPASS in Pennsylvania has established the standard by which other State's self service solutions are measured.

## **IS THIS PROJECT AN INNOVATION, BEST PRACTICE?** Yes