



Reducing poverty through improved social assistance delivery

Arizona is a diverse, sprawling state of deserts, bustling cities, and picturesque canyons, and even though abundant job opportunities continue to draw people to the state, booming populations in major metropolitan areas do not reflect the economic struggles of many rural communities in Northeastern Arizona.

Counties such as Navajo and Apache—the [poorest county in Arizona](#)—continue to experience significant socioeconomic burdens, which make temporary financial assistance and career programs crucial for rural community members.

State and federal resources supporting community programs significantly reduce the poverty cycle. Arizona for example, has made considerable progress in decreasing poverty by 3.4 percent between 2015 and 2018, the [largest percentage of any state](#) in the nation.

Stephanie, who has worked in the [Workforce system](#) for more than five years, shared, “A lot of these assistance service organizations aren’t communicating with each other, and there is a severe lack of awareness about state resources available to people in need. The big gap is in service providers knowing that there are structured, funded programs out there that can help people.”

The U.S. Department of Labor allocates Workforce Education and Training funds to 12 Local Workforce Development Areas in Arizona, but they can only use these funds for specific purposes related to workforce education, training, and support. Recipients must also meet eligibility criteria to receive long-term career planning assistance. Even though most case workers and service organizations provide assistance for people in

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Executive director of the Northeastern Arizona Community Resource Network (NACRN)

poverty such as rental, utility, and transportation funding, they are often unaware of the workforce programs. These support long-term financial well-being and independence by providing career counseling and planning in addition to assisting with job training and work-related expenses, such as clothes and gas money.

The state of Arizona currently lacks unified data on all available social programs. After years of siloed social delivery service frustrations, Stephanie decided to take action and initiate a new process of connecting people with appropriate resources using digital technology.

Stephanie learned about the ASU Smart City Cloud Innovation Center (ASU CIC) powered by AWS and reached out to them about her vision. She wanted to create a streamlined process for case managers to gather program eligibility information from clients and provide quick access to all available programs, as opposed to only the most well recognized programs among case managers. The process would ensure resources were tailored to the person seeking help and would reduce dependencies on social case management staff and their specific knowledge.

The ASU CIC leveraged Amazon's innovative Working Backwards methodology to explore ideas, and NACRN determined that a cloud-based data platform would be the most effective way to solve the overarching resource access problem. The platform would integrate data from a cross-section of assistance service providers and offer a user-friendly online interface to make program data easily accessible to case managers. The team developed a prototype for NACRN with a simplified universal intake process and referral management, ensuring all individuals receive qualified services. The prototype has a web interface and provides accurate information about how to apply for and receive services. Case workers can also obtain immediate access to a dashboard of all available resources in their region without manually researching social programs.

By creating a cloud solution that recognizes the needs of organizations across the state, Stephanie saw an opportunity for NACRN to help people throughout Arizona, and she's already received interest from three other state workforce programs.

Stephanie says many states are struggling with the same inefficiency problem and are currently using costly off-the-shelf technology platforms that do not address the nuances of caseworker and applicant needs. Her goal is to have 75 affiliates built into the solution by the time of the launch. NACRN secured funding for the development of a pilot with a beta test in 2020 and a full launch of the solution for case workers in 2021.

Resources related to this project are available for reuse and published open source by the ASU Smart City Innovation Center powered by AWS.

Get in touch with the CIC team and learn more about this challenge:
smartchallenges.asu.edu/challenges/reducing-poverty-digital-service-delivery



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