

## Service Delivery Redesign Executive Summary

In 2018, Ramsey County began the work to define and describe the provision of county services in a way which centered the resident and their experience launching the Residents First strategic priority. The 2018, 2019 and 2020 Strategic Plans each prioritized driving improvements in service delivery and facilities, with an emphasis on engaging residents and employees, process efficiency, innovative technology and accessibility. From the strategic priority emerged the Residents First Program in 2019. The Residents First Program conducted enterprise-wide analysis of operations to find gaps and overlaps in how services are provided, worked directly with residents to include their input in recommended changes and engaged employees to improve the resident and employee experience. In March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ramsey County identified the need to expedite changes to the resident experience.

The goals of the project are that:

1. Residents are easily connected to needed services.
2. Service delivery is centered on resident needs, rather than policies, rules, budgets, or building locations. The service delivery system is invisible to residents.
3. Establish a “one door” system where there is parity in services and quality of services regardless of how a resident contacts the county.

The major components for the first six months of the project, which set the stage for future changes over the next two to three years, were to:

- Establish five services center hubs which will offer comprehensive services in person. Initially these service centers will include Workforce Solutions, Financial Assistance Services, Social Services, and Property Tax services.
- Staff service centers with navigators who will act as a guide to county services, connecting people to needed services and ensure people get the services they need.
- Provide technology access at service centers so that residents can connect online to services, access technology for other things like completing applications, job searches and applications, and other things that require the internet.

This evaluation answers the following questions:

1. What have we learned in the first six months to inform and improve practices in the next two years?
2. What is the resident experience of service centers, technology access, and navigators? How does this compare to other ways of accessing services?
3. What are the training and support needs of navigators to successfully service residents?

The service centers and navigator services were launched in August 2020. This report focuses on August to December 2020. The full report is available at the [CARES Evaluation Page](#).

## What We Learned

### **What have we learned in the first six months to inform and improve practices in the next two years?**

Traffic to service centers other than the downtown location has been limited thus far and analysis of usage patterns indicates residents are still generally accessing services in the location where they have done so in the past. While Ramsey County has engaged in some marketing and outreach to promote

usage of alternate locations, this has had limited impact thus far. The location of the service centers in Shoreview, Maplewood, and to some extent Roseville and Plato, may not be the right locations to reach residents with the greatest need.

While the navigator position was originally created to staff the service centers, the two can operate independently, which could maximize the potential of each and alleviate some of the current barriers for residents to access these services. Navigators could be made available more widely than just in the service centers, including virtual services for residents who feel more comfortable using technology. Ramsey County could explore opportunities to partner with community-based organizations to better reach vulnerable populations.

The development of the navigator position happened quickly in response to COVID-19, which ultimately impacted the development of the job description, the structuring of duties vis-à-vis the physical space in which the service centers are located, and how the navigators work in conjunction with FAS and library staff. This resulted in some lack of clarity around the navigator position among the various parties, with FAS staff seeing navigators as greeters or gate-keepers for the financial workers at the Downtown Service Center, and navigators being tasked with responsibility for all computer assistance and maintenance in the libraries. However, this position was originally intended to have greater responsibility and seniority; thus, the individuals taking on this role have experienced some frustration as they see their duties being largely administrative and not commensurate to their seniority and compensation levels.

### **What is the resident experience of service centers, technology access, and navigators? How does this compare to other ways of accessing services?**

For about half of the residents reported in the service center resident survey, it was their first time visiting the service center, although data indicate that another quarter of clients, especially those with financial assistance needs required more than one visit to address their needs. In these cases, both residents and Ramsey County staff reported that the issue was resolved efficiently and to the resident's satisfaction, which indicates that the level of service provision is meeting residents' needs and reducing the potential for delayed or limited assistance during a time of extreme social challenges.

The demographic profiles of users at the Downtown Service Center versus users at the library sites indicate that downtown users are generally more vulnerable, including being less likely to have internet at home and feel less comfortable accessing services virtually (including telephone and online). They were less likely to drive to the site, instead using public transportation, rides from friends, or walking. While suburban library locations should logically be more accessible to residents from the northern suburbs, they are not being as well-used as the Downtown Service Center. This may be due to lack of awareness about the other sites and/or high demand for FAS driving residents' expectations that the Downtown Service Center is where they need to go. Many vulnerable residents from the urban communities around downtown Saint Paul are still accessing services through this Downtown Service Center.

The question of where to locate the service centers and how to house the navigators within them suggests a conceptual shift should be made in the relationship between them. Whereas the service centers are established physical locations to which residents might visit to access services, the navigators (and the services they provide) may not necessarily need to be accessed through a physical location. Expanding navigator service provision through virtual platforms would enable the county to serve a broader range of residents without requiring in-person contact, including those who have limited mobility. This could include self-service options provided through telephone, online, and through kiosks located in the service centers for residents to scan and send required documents, access forms, and monitor the status of their applications.

### **What are the training and support needs of navigators to successfully serve residents?**

Overall, the navigator training received good feedback from both navigators and FAS staff, including the four focus areas of service provision. While the deep dive into each of these areas may be tedious or repetitious for longer-term county staff who are moving into the navigator role, it was felt to be appropriate and even necessary by others, especially those with shorter employment tenure with the county and thus less background knowledge of county resources and processes.

The greatest area in which navigators need more training was using the MAXIS system, especially for navigators without an extensive background working with Ramsey County overall, and FAS in particular. Financial services staff felt that having navigators with the capacity to interpret and complete notes in MAXIS about their interactions with residents made their jobs easier and was essential to ensure that residents receive accurate and consistent messaging about their case.

Finally, navigators' authority is generally limited to gathering and passing information to others within the county system. In some cases, this authority could be expanded to fulfill simple requests such as writing a receipt for property tax payments or other services that residents seek to resolve directly through these agents, with appropriate training content to ensure that these requests are handled according to county rules.

## **Recommendations**

### **Short-term Recommendations**

- Continue to expand marking and outreach. Target residents broadly, particularly in the suburbs, and send county representatives to places like schools, community groups, and religious institutions tell them about service centers and navigators.
- Explore opportunities to provide navigator services outside of service centers, including virtual and user-managed options, as well as at community organizations.
- Enhance strategic communication between navigators and financial workers so that each position's roles and responsibility are clear and well-positioned to complement each other.
- Consider a three-prong approach to staffing Downtown, with customer service representatives as the first line for answering basic questions, financial workers available for complex FAS-related needs, and navigators available for needs that cross departments.
- Work with Information Services and staff to develop a short-term data tracking system.

### **Long-term Recommendations**

- Regularly review navigator training to ensure it is comprehensive and targeted to meet the demands of the navigator position, including ongoing refresher trainings for services offered less frequently or on a cyclical basis (like voting).
- Continue to engage with the First Human Service Modernization project for a long-term solution to data tracking and sharing.
- Implement enhanced technology for residents to offer services, such as self-service kiosks, online chat tools, and interactive website tools for residents to access Ramsey County support.
- Identify support and resources needed in FAS to ensure prompt customer service. Along with the three-prong approach to the Downtown service center described in the short-term recommendations, in the long-term build on the Human Service Modernization project to ensure FAS has the technology and staffing resources necessary to provide prompt customer service.
- Conceptually separate navigator roles from the physical service centers. A service center-based model is still a building-centric model, even if more services are available at those sites than

previously. Move toward a resident-centric model where residents can access county services through multiple physical and online doors, with navigators as the linchpin.