RAMSEY COUNTY

Service Redesign:
Interim Report on Navigator Interview Themes

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Executive Summary

In 2018, Ramsey County began to define and describe provision of county services to center more fully on the resident experience. This launched the strategic priority of Residents First, bringing forward concepts and plans under the *Residents First: Effective, Efficient, and Accessible Operations* strategic priority. This plan created five service centers (Downtown, Westside, Roseville, Shoreview, and Maplewood, of which the latter three are located within the same building as the county library) that offer all county services from one location, anchoring service provision to residents' needs rather than to department-specific buildings.

The goals of the service center redesign project are to:

- Ensure that residents are easily connected to needed services.

- Center our service delivery on resident needs, rather than policies, rules, budgets, or building locations; the "service delivery system" is invisible to residents.

- Establish a "one door" system where there is parity in services and quality of services, regardless of how a resident may contact the county.

In March 2020, Ramsey County identified a need to expedite this service redesign in order to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and our enhanced effort to serve our residents with funding from the CARES Act. Two new positions, "navigators" and "navigator supervisors," were created to staff the service centers. The navigators' role is to assist and guide residents in accessing the services they need based on individual profiles. Staff were redeployed from other positions within Ramsey County to fill these roles and provided one week of training on a broad range of topics that a navigator might be expected to know.

This evaluation seeks to understand what worked well and what can be improved based on the first six months of this service redesign project. The navigators started work in June 2020; this evaluation focuses on operations through December 2020. Going forward, the results of this study will be combined with other data collected from the service centers in 2020, including a Resident Use survey and general monitoring data reported by the navigators throughout the year, to produce a full report expected in March 2021. *Please note that recommendations in this report are preliminary and more data are being collected that may change them.*

The evaluation questions are:

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

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

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

This interim report focuses on interviews conducted with navigators and their supervisors in November 2020, as well as data from the tracking form used by navigators.

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

- <u>Service Centers' Differentiated Demand</u>. The five service centers have different levels of demand both in terms of overall visits and service needs of visitors. Two-thirds of visits were to the Downtown service center. The majority of visitors to Downtown had needs related to Financial Assistance Services (FAS), while library visitors were most often there to use a computer.
- <u>Navigator Role and Service Centers</u>. Respondents felt a conceptual shift should be made to consider navigators independently from service centers. While navigators should be available at service centers, navigator services need to be out in the community where people needing county services are found, such as community centers, emergency shelters, or food shelves. At the service centers, the physical placement of navigators prevents them from having private conversations with residents and encourages staff to view them as receptionists or security guards. Navigators would like to increase use of technology to provide virtual navigation services.
- <u>Defining the Navigator Role.</u> The navigator position was envisioned as a high-level position, but has devolved to cleaning computers, directing traffic, or as a gatekeeper for FAS. Their authority is often limited to referring residents to other departments and they are concerned they are becoming a "middleman" when they would like to be able to fully resolve resident needs directly.
- <u>Profile of a Successful Navigator.</u> A successful navigator needs deep knowledge of Ramsey County services and how to access them, as well as compassion and the ability to manage stressful situations, a strong desire to help vulnerable community members, and versatile problem-solving skills. Long-tenured county staff are more successful when they have a broad understanding of county offerings, how things work in the county, and knowledge of administrative databases.
- <u>Management Feedback.</u> While navigators appreciated the need to rotate between sites and this was generally seen as good practice, they were concerned that the rotation schedule allow for relationship-development with staff at each site. The shared supervision model was often viewed positively, but respondents had concerns about different styles and expectations of supervisors and the need for a person to go to with personal issues that impact work.

Findings: What is the resident experience of service centers, technology access, and navigators?

- <u>Resident Awareness of Service Centers and Navigators.</u> Respondents felt that enhanced outreach and communication was necessary to raise awareness of service centers and navigator services. After decades of accessing county services one way, residents are not yet aware of the change. Respondents suggested sending county representatives to schools, non-profits, and places of worship, in addition to broader communication strategies.
- <u>Expanding Service Center Capabilities.</u> Respondents felt that technology, such as kiosks used in Dakota County, could help residents with self-service needs, such as scanning required documents or checking a case status. They also suggested adding other supports or tools to sites such as bus passes, expanded telephone availability, on-site food shelves, or mailboxes.
- <u>Barriers to Service.</u> The most cited barrier to service was people who lack telephone or internet access. Visitors to the Downtown site who lack telephones or access to email have trouble connecting with their financial workers due to the lack of telephones available in the lobby and workers nearly all working remotely. There has been a perceived increase in homeless residents visiting the downtown site who have had benefits cut off because they

did not have a reliable place to receive mail. Having more financial workers on-site or a way to get immediate support was seen as necessary for these residents.

- Libraries' and Service Centers' Coexistence. Overall respondents felt that libraries were a good choice for service centers, often citing the lack of stigma related to visiting a library compared to other county buildings. There was concern about the libraries' ongoing tolerance for services centers due to the space they take up, noisy visitors, and disruptions to other library patrons.

Findings: What are the navigators' training and support needs?

- Training Curriculum Revisions. Respondents felt the four key areas they received training on (Workforce Solutions, Financial Assistance Services, Social Services, and property tax) were the right areas. They would like training on child support, courts, and Child Protection. They would also like one-page information sheets for reference, as well as more hands-on training and refreshers on topics they use seasonally.

Recommendations

- Conduct community engagement and outreach to gather inputs on locations or partners for navigator services. Explore opportunities to establish navigator services in suggested communities using partnerships with emergency shelters, community agencies, and the city. Expand hours to include nights and weekends.
- Address changes to the physical set up of service centers to offer users more privacy while retaining the approachability of the navigator.
- Strengthen communication efforts to inform residents about the availability of service centers and navigators.
- Ensure the navigator job description is clear and specific. Explore opportunities to return computer support for general users of the library to library staff or customer service representatives.
- Decouple the navigator role from the service center concept. Address needs of specific service centers' users, like computer support at libraries or financial assistance expertise in Downtown, separately from navigators while expanding the navigators' capacity to provide services more broadly.
- Identify support and resources needed in FAS to ensure that when a resident reaches out for assistance with their benefits, they receive prompt assistance. Add more financial workers to the Downtown location.
- Build capacity to provide navigator support virtually.
- Work in close collaboration with library management to promote effective cooperation. Explore strategies to organize space that will limit disruption to quiet library spaces while promoting accessibility of the navigator.
- Revise the training curriculum to streamline some of the more extensive content areas and include more hands-on training with MAXIS (the FAS administrative database). Develop quick reference guides and offer regular refresher trainings.

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Introduction

In 2018, Ramsey County began to define and describe provision of county services to center more fully on the resident experience. This launched the strategic priority of Residents First, bringing forward concepts and plans under the *Residents First: Effective, Efficient, and Accessible Operations* strategic priority. This plan created five service centers (Downtown, Westside, Roseville, Shoreview, and Maplewood, of which the latter three are located within the same building as the county library) that offer all county services from one location, anchoring service provision to residents' needs rather than to department-specific buildings.

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Methods

Overall, Ramsey County measures the effectiveness of CARES-funded projects against two overarching questions: (1) Are Ramsey County residents better off as a result of CARES programming? and (2) Did the project achieve the outcomes the community was seeking? These two overarching questions will be applied to the Service Redesign project through the application of the following three key study questions:

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

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

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

Additionally, as Ramsey County seeks to capture lessons learned for the post-COVID era, the evaluation will also consider how we can improve our partner relationships post-COVID, as well as suggestions for expanded outreach to enhance these partnerships.

Mixed Methods Data Collection. Qualitative data for this report consist of 11 semi-structured interviews that were conducted over web conference platforms with six navigators and five navigator supervisors in November 2020. Questions between the two respondent groups were similar but not the same (copies of the questionnaires are provided in Appendix A: Interview Questionnaires) and explore the main themes of the research questions identified above. Respondents include all navigator and navigator supervisor staff who were in their positions in November 2020 (except one individual who was out of the office during the data collection period), as well as one supervisor who had left the position. Participation in the interviews was voluntary; sessions were recorded and transcribed in all cases except one, in which the respondent had technical difficulties. Interviews were scheduled in advance and respondents provided a copy of the interview questions so they could prepare responses before the meeting if they wished to.

Interviews were transcribed with Otter and coded using Dedoose according to a code set developed by the research team prior to starting the analysis process. Three researchers participated in the coding process to enhance validity through comparison of analysis results. Finally, the results were organized into a formal Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations and Quotations matrix, to which all three researchers contributed content; these data were combined with the quantitative data (described below) and organized into this report.

Navigator Tracking Metrics. Supporting data from the Navigator Metrics tracking tool is also included in this report. This is a Microsoft Forms database where navigators track user information and demographics, including data on users' age, gender, ethnicity/race, and spoken language preference, as well as the site visited, type and topic of interaction with the navigator, and how much time they spent working with the navigator. These data were analyzed using SPSS and included in this report to the extent that information was relevant and contributed significant content.

Limitations. While no major limitations were noted in the research process, possible limitations to the data must be considered, and include the following:

- **Respondent bias**: Respondents may formulate their responses to please the interviewer or withhold information that the respondent feels could be damaging to someone or something associated with the project. Concerns about this limitation is especially prevalent in this study as the respondents are Ramsey County employees and thus are dependent on the position for their employment and are correspondingly intimate with the topic and have strong emotional connection to it. In order to mitigate this issue to the greatest extent possible, the research team read a short statement at the outset of each interview, assuring the respondent of their anonymity and encouraging frank dialogue.

- **Recall bias**: Respondent may recall information incorrectly, which is a common and documented issue in observer reliability and self-reported data. Staff who have worked in these positions for the past six months, during a turbulent and emotional time in history, have thoughts and opinions about their roles that are influenced by emotion, which influence how they perceive their jobs and positions within the county structure.

- **Interpretation bias**: The data collector could misunderstand the respondents' meaning. While the use of video recording mitigates this issue to some extent by enabling full review of the interview and transcribing of the conversation, there is still potential for the research team to have misinterpreted a respondent's intended meaning.

- **Data collection errors**. Navigator use of the tracking form decreased mid-November, particularly in downtown. All data from the tracking form should be viewed as an underestimate as many visits were not logged.

Findings and Conclusions

Study Question 1: What have we learned in the first six months to inform and improve practices in the next two years?

Service Centers' Differentiated Demand
The five service centers have different levels of demand and serve different resident communities. Figure 1 shows the number of visits by site from October to December 2020. Note that use of the tracking form decreased mid-November so this is an undercount of actual visits. A total of 2,655 visits were logged, with 66% to the Downtown site. The type of visit varied by site, with 85% of those logged visits to Downtown and 76% of logged visits to the West Side seeking help with basic questions and forms. Libraries saw use for service center tools, such as use of computers. As shown in Figure 2, 96% of Maplewood, 82% of Shoreview, and 67% of Roseville Library visitors used computers or other service center tools.
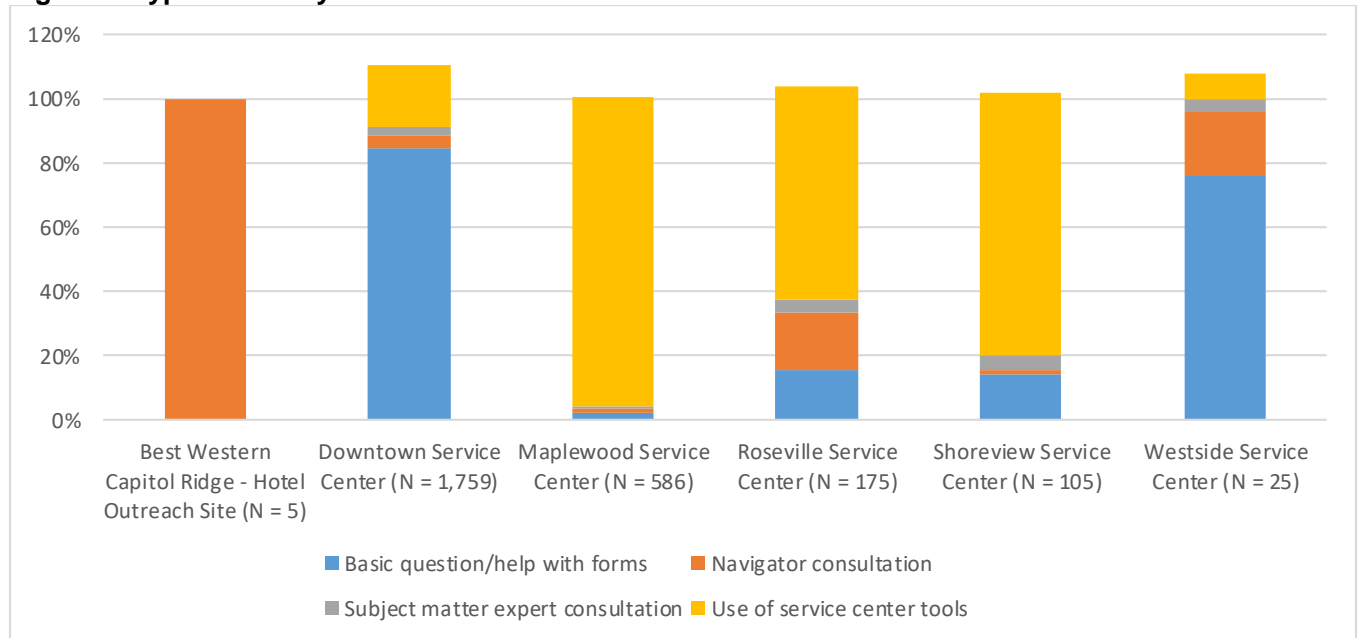
Figure 1: Visits by Service Center, Oct - Dec. 2020
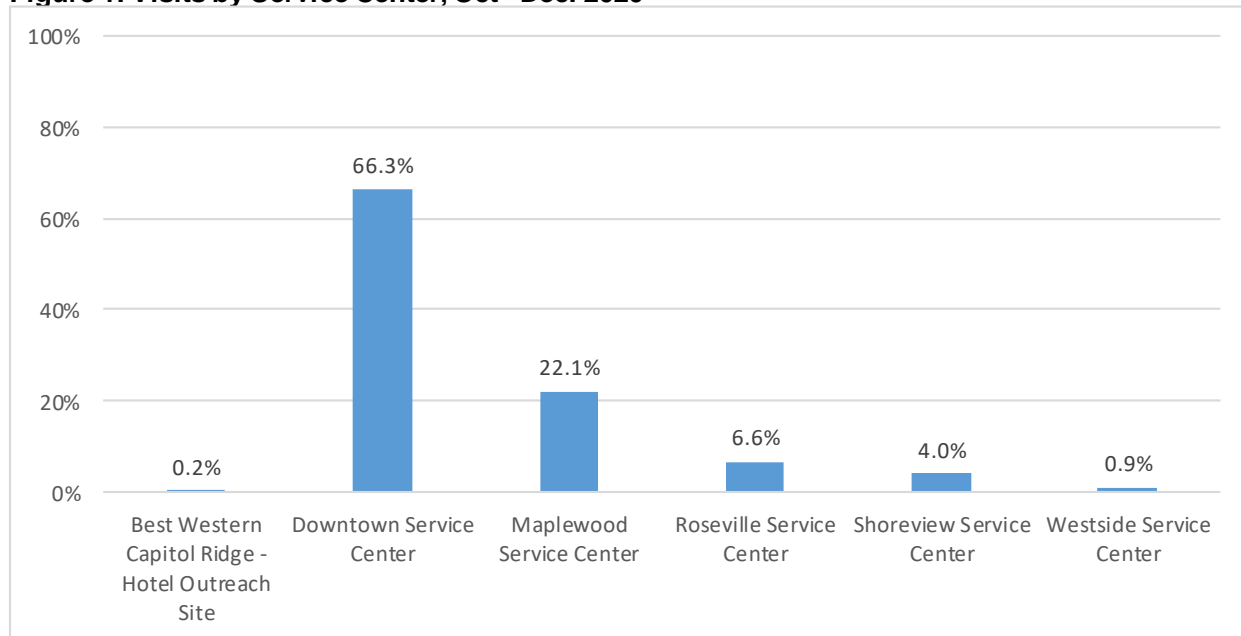
* Note that the majority of the visits logged to Maplewood were for voting/elections.

As seen in the tracking form data, interview respondents indicated that some service centers are better utilized than others and there are variations in the types of services in demand in each of the existing centers.
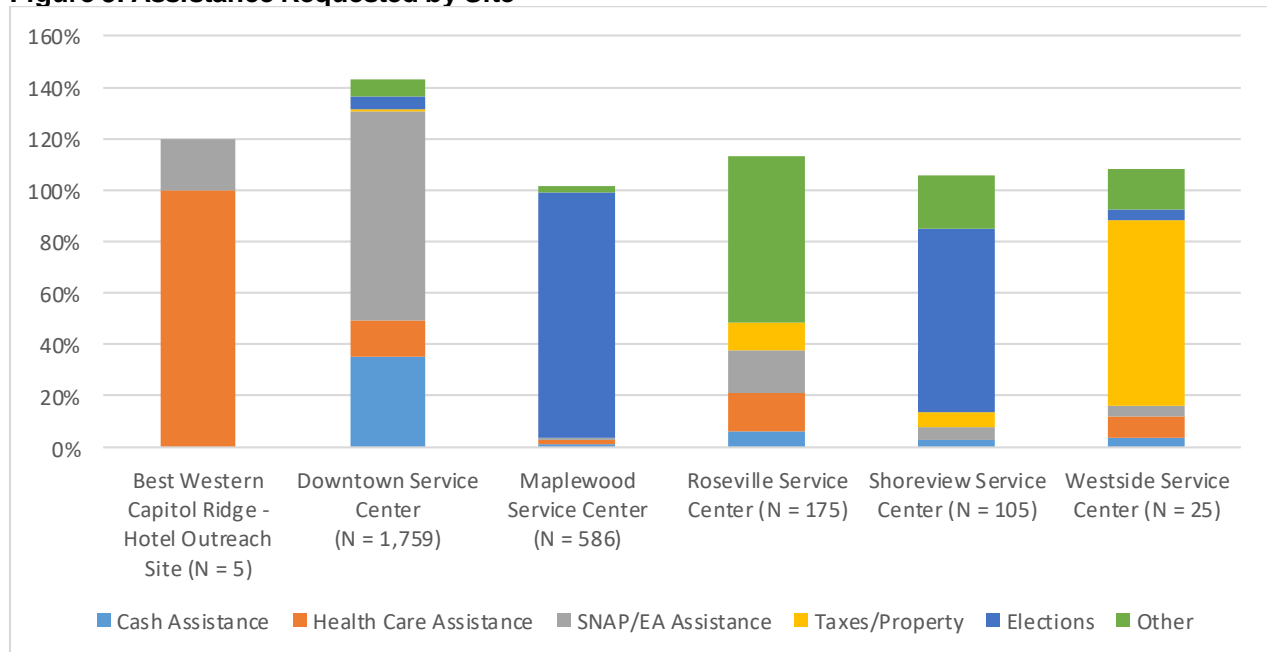
Figure 2: Type of Visit by Site

Figure 2: Type of Visit by Site

Legend:
- Basic question/help with forms (blue)
- Navigator consultation (orange)
- Subject matter expert consultation (gray)
- Use of service center tools (yellow)

Sites: Best Western Capitol Ridge - Hotel Outreach Site (N = 5), Downtown Service Center (N = 1,759), Maplewood Service Center (N = 586), Roseville Service Center (N = 175), Shoreview Service Center (N = 105), Westside Service Center (N = 25)

* Note that visitors may have visited for more than one need and totals exceed 100% of visits.

Uneven demand levels between centers indicates that some service centers are not strategically placed to reach at-risk and marginalized community members. In communities like Shoreview and Roseville there is lack of awareness about the centers as a resource; people are using the libraries for what they have always used them for and are just interacting with different staff than previously. Similarly, in Downtown, visitors are using the sites primarily for Financial Assistance Services (FAS) related needs, just as people have always done. (Figure 3)

Figure 3: Assistance Requested by Site

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Legend:
- Cash Assistance (blue)
- Health Care Assistance (orange)
- SNAP/EA Assistance (gray)
- Taxes/Property (yellow)
- Elections (dark blue)
- Other (green)

Sites: Best Western Capitol Ridge - Hotel Outreach Site (N = 5), Downtown Service Center (N = 1,759), Maplewood Service Center (N = 586), Roseville Service Center (N = 175), Shoreview Service Center (N = 105), Westside Service Center (N = 25)

* Note that visitors may have visited for more than one need and totals exceed 100% of visits.

These data corroborate what was reported by navigators in the interviews, including the following observations:

> "I think we need to go where people are and not have people come to us. I think that that was the whole vision. We want to meet people where they're at and be in the community and be accessible. I know Ramsey County is big, but for the four service areas that we're looking at right now, I don't think we're in the right spot."

> "We are not seeing too many people coming for what we want them to use the service centers, it is mainly using the computers ... It's great that we have the service centers as a base. But we need to go out to the community service centers, to the shelters, to Dorothy Day and the city libraries, because right there is where the people are that we can help. If we have a mobile navigator and we send them to these places; they are equipped to answer any questions or at least help people navigate child protection or financial, helping to complete applications. We can ... extend it to these places where we're going to find people that need this service."

Separate Navigator Role from Service Centers

Respondents felt that the service centers do help residents to access services from one location. However, they felt that a conceptual shift should be made to consider navigators separate from the service centers; both are essential but not interchangeable. Respondents felt that navigator services need to be expanded to reach residents beyond the in-service model that the service centers represent. Respondents felt there is greater need for service centers in lower-income, inner-city locations like University/Midway, Frogtown, East Side, and Rondo communities. Respondents suggested that the stigma of the Downtown location as "the food stamps office" meant that people would like to access services from other locations. Respondents suggested partnering with emergency shelters, community centers, or food shelves, to provide roving outreach and transform service provision into a service-based model, rather than a location-based approach.

> "I really think this [service center model] would really work if we could get it going. I like the idea and I think it would work because it really is helping people in the communities be able to get help without having to go to that one spot downtown."

> "Walking into a building that's known as a library has a lot less stigma attached to it than walking into 160 Kellogg. If I'm a family and I know that I need to go to the library, and I want to apply for food stamps, but I'm scared that somebody may see me, going into a service center and being able to access that is a lot better than having to go to 160."

In this process, navigators could better utilize technology to be virtual based, a process which has already been undertaken at the time of this report. As the "face of Ramsey County," navigators are more available through virtual platforms including web and telephone, as well as roving navigators who rotate around to external partners, such as shelters, community centers, and places of worship.

> "I know that there's a bigger vision, in terms of the service centers being able to offer services via email, or in the electronic version of the service center or a phone bay. I do see that I think that would be a great benefit because not everybody wants to come in person. We should be able to extend that same service we do for the service center, whether it's communicating via email or if it's by phone in a call center."

Additionally, respondents reported the need for a different physical set-up at existing service centers that allows navigators to have privacy to meet with resident and separates their role from that of a receptionist or security guard. Respondents indicated that while it is important to have the navigator be centrally located and visible for accessibility, most locations offer limited privacy to sit with residents and discuss what can be potentially sensitive or confidential issues.

> "*Where the navigators are sitting, you're walking in the lobby and you're basically baring your soul; there's not a lot of privacy… if we could be separate, to protect that for people. It's not an easy thing to do for a lot of people, to walk in and ask for help.*"

Defining the Navigator Role

Respondents said that the navigator position is supposed to be a high-level position but has devolved into cleaning computers and being a receptionist or directing traffic for the site. In the downtown location, the navigators serve as "gate-keepers" to FAS and visitors do not understand that they are not financial workers. In other sites, the duties of maintaining the computers or serving as a greeter have overshadowed the position's purpose and led to confusion by other staff; those who have been physically away from the office do not know what this new position is. Physical placement at the entry makes it easy to see navigators as receptionists. Navigators reported that their initial sense of excitement and opportunity about the role was decreasing as they deal with the lack of clarity in their role and the routine tasks they have been asked to take on.

> "*I feel like there's a lack of definition around the role of a navigator. I feel the boundaries aren't clear. I feel we have a vision that is unclear. The staff at first, we had all this energy and all this excitement, I feel like that's starting to die down. Because I feel like a lot of our staff are starting to feel like they clean computers and are the receptionist.*"

> "*There were many days it is still a very clerical role. If they want to pay me my top salary ... to stuff an envelope and wash off the computer, I can do that. I just don't know how much it will ever turn into a social services input. So that part I'm pretty disappointed in.*"

Another challenge is that the scope of a navigator's authority is limited to referring residents to other departments within the county. In some cases, this limitation was frustrating to the navigators who wished to help the resident resolve their issue fully. A couple of respondents reported that they felt limited in their ability to fill requests in real time, especially for property tax issues that often had to be referred to Property Tax and Election Services, or FAS issues that required a financial worker to manage. Sometimes this limited scope impacted their capacity to fulfill even simple requests, like providing a receipt for a property tax payment. The navigators lacked full authority to implement some of the more complex or formal actions needed by a resident and reported feeling like a "middleman."

> "*We need to be a little bit more specific because sometime this is how we ended up with people wanting service and we cannot provide it because we are just the middleman. They think 'this is the place where I can pay my taxes.' Yes, you can, but we are not going to give you a receipt, we cannot accept cash, you need to have your check. I think that right now, the way that this is displayed, is giving the wrong impression to residents that service centers are for everything.*"

Profile of a Successful Navigator

Respondents said that the qualities of a successful navigator require deep knowledge of the services that Ramsey County offers and how to assist residents to access them, as well as compassion and an ability to manage stressful situations, a strong desire to help vulnerable members of community, and the versatility of spirit to problem-solve.

Individuals who are selected to work as navigators should have the right skill sets including a strong desire to work with diverse communities. Longer-tenured county staff are more likely to be effective in this role as their past experience provides them with a broader understanding of county offerings, how to make things work, and how to use systems like MAXIS[1] to answer questions about FAS eligibility (a key service of the navigator position).

> *"It takes a person who is non-judgmental, compassionate, because the clients that we encounter, some of them we're encountering them on absolutely their worst day. We need to be able to make sure that we can service them … to be in a high stress situation but be compassionate at the same time."*

> *"There is no amount of school or any sort of anything that anybody could have taught me to jump into this role, other than my experience. Having [many] years of organizational knowledge has been crucial to my success."*

Management Feedback

Respondents shared input about day-to-day management that could improve their ability to do their jobs and be supported as the project developed. Some respondents felt that uncertainty around the amount of time that the redeployment would last was challenging for them and caused some anxiety.

> *"I think with redeployment, it's really hard because there's a lot of unknown, a lot of uncertainty, not knowing how long this is going to go for or they can put the kibosh on the service centers and we all go back. Are we just out to do this until COVID is done and when the pandemic is over, then we all go back to our old jobs?"*

Navigators also raised the topic of the current strategy to rotate staff between sites. While this was generally accepted to be a good practice, respondents were concerned that the rotation schedule allow enough time to develop comfort at each location. Two weeks to one month was generally suggested as a comfortable timeframe for rotations; less time would cause stress and reduce opportunities to forge the necessary relationships with library staff. Navigators understood the need to become familiar with differing resident needs at each site; however, they also stressed the importance of developing relationships with staff at each site and felt that a longer tenure at each site would help to support a deeper understanding of each site's unique characteristics.

Several respondents spoke of a shared supervision model. While navigators appreciated having different kinds of support and multiple people to problem-solve with, they were also frustrated because supervisors' expectations varied, and they were concerned by a potential lack of privacy if they needed to share personal issues impacting their work.

Overall, the fast rate of deployment for this service center redesign required flexibility and good-natured navigators with a can-do attitude. The fast deployment did result in some challenges related to staffing

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[1] The financial assistance administrative database.

and human resources issues. These challenges were generally minimal and at a reasonable level for the quick turn-around time.

Study Question 2: What is the resident experience at the service centers? How does this compare with other ways of accessing services?

Resident Awareness of Service Centers and Navigators
Respondents felt that enhanced outreach is necessary to raise awareness of the service centers. After decades of accessing county services one way, residents are not aware of the new model. As shown in Figure 3 above, most service center visitors are still accessing services at the location where they have always done so. Residents are not aware of service centers or navigators. This resulted in library-based navigators not having much demand for their navigator duties and Downtown based navigators serving as a front door to FAS.

One respondent suggested coupling a mobile navigator role with other services offered in the community, such as food shelves, so people can one-stop-shop for services in a setting they are already used to visiting. Two respondents suggested sending county representatives to schools, non-profits, or churches to tell people about the service centers. Others suggested television or billboard advertising. Several respondents expressed skepticism about the efficacy of the current flyer mailing strategy as a sufficient tool to get the word out and suggested strong outreach was needed to increase awareness within the resident community.

> *"One of the biggest gaps was not paying from the beginning for advertisement. Getting the word out... If we could have got more of an advertisement push. I know they did the Facebook and social media stuff. I definitely think that one of the biggest gaps was that: the advertisement, the push of it."*

> *"Because it's [flyer mailing] just not cost effective, it's just not effective in a lot of different ways. People don't open their mail, first of all. Billboards. There's a lot of different ways that we can do outreach."*

Expanding Service Center Capabilities
Respondents saw a lot of potential for improving offerings at service centers. Several envisioned better use of technology to allow residents to self-serve for basic questions. Prior to the pandemic, FAS explored the potential to offer kiosks for residents to scan required documents, look up the status of the cases, and access forms. Dakota County has kiosks that do many of these functions, which free up their staff time to handle more complicated situations and lessen the amount of time their residents spend waiting in lines.

Others suggested offering support and tools to ease access to community resources as well as county services. They identified unmet needs around transportation, like providing bus passes; use of telephones (especially for residents experiencing homelessness); on-site food shelves; and mailboxes. A couple of respondents mentioned the issue of non-English-speaking residents and the challenges they have in finding interpreters to help them access services.

Barriers to Service
Respondents identified several common barriers to residents: lack of phone or internet access, meaning residents must come in person to receive services; difficulty contacting financial workers; and

people experiencing homelessness who do not receive notices by mail and have their benefits discontinued.

Particularly for residents visiting the Downtown site, many do not have telephone or internet access. For some this means coming to the service center to make general phone calls, check email, or access the internet. More services are only available via telephone or the internet due to the pandemic, not just county services, but other community-based services as well. People come in person but rely on navigators to make phone calls for them.

> *"I think there's a certain percent of our population that doesn't have phones and can't communicate. With the buildings shut down and offering very limited services, most of the workers are working from home. They come in frustrated, unable to reach their worker, they have a phone for 30 minutes, they don't answer, they leave a message, and no callback. It is just awful. They come in and ask 'help me.' We are not financial workers. We can't help them at that point, so it almost feels like we're trying to make this a one door approach. We are really a stop on their way to another door."*

Prior to the pandemic, a bank of telephones was available to call financial workers. These are now not available to reduce contact with surfaces during COVID. This has been a burden for people, especially when they call their financial worker and need to leave a message. There is nowhere for these residents to receive a return call. With FAS staff working remotely and navigators unable to address every FAS-related need, the telephone has become even more important. This is of critical importance to people experiencing homelessness who do not receive mailed notices related to their financial assistance case and come in person to have benefits restored. This is a combination of longer-term challenges related to large caseloads and lack of access to technology such as document management software that are exacerbated by work structural changes due to the pandemic.

> *"I think that the navigators in that location, really, you could hire 60 navigators. But if they're all coming to FAS, we really need to have 60 FAS workers in there."*

Respondents felt that the Downtown site would be better served by financial workers who have the expertise to answer FAS-related questions directly, since the majority of visitors were there for financial assistance needs. As stated previously, navigators often felt as if they were the middleman and residents need a more direct connection to FAS. This will become more pressing as waivers to program requirements due to the pandemic end. Physically, navigators at the Downtown location are the front door to FAS services; this may be duplicative and an unnecessary step. Navigators and supervisors are concerned about the potential for burn out among navigators who face challenges in resolving these requests, and the investment in MAXIS training for navigators when this role might be better served by financial workers.

> *"We want to leverage the difference between the navigator and the financial worker; it is really that the navigator has the time to take the call and walk you through. If that means it's an hour, it's an hour. The FAS line doesn't have the opportunity to do that. We don't have a caseload of 1,000 people waiting to call back, we're really serving that one client ... The navigators at 160 are basically the gatekeepers to FAS. It's not the same experience. This is not what we're trying to do."*

Libraries' and Service Centers' Coexistence.
Respondents expressed general approval for the strategy of locating service centers in the libraries. However, several navigators expressed concern about the libraries' ongoing tolerance for service centers in their space as service provision takes up space within the library building, is potentially noisy, and might be disruptive to the library patrons. This was thought by some respondents to be an area of potential conflict when the libraries resume full operation after COVID.

Overall, the strategy of locating service centers in the libraries has potential to reach residents outside of the downtown location and offer accessible service provision. However, there is a need to be sensitive to the environment of the library regarding noise and space issues.

> "If they do start really coming to these places [service centers], then you have to worry about the libraries, because libraries were made to be quiet."

> "I'm used to being in the lobby at 160, where there's 200 to 300 people a day, and I'm talking and I might be getting yelled at, and somebody might be yelling at me, and that we're dealing with our clients. That's just how it goes. I'm used to that; I'm comfortable in that environment. But you bring that kind of environment into the libraries, and they're like: 'Whoa, we need to kick them out! We can't have that here.' Well, we can because this is a service center. So yes, we can. This homeless resident deserves the same respect that your resident picking up their books does. Same County; same resident. Residents first. Different perspectives, different area."

Study Question 3: What are navigators' training and support needs?

Training Curriculum Revisions
Respondents felt that the current training package focusing on the four key service areas (Workforce Solutions, FAS, property tax, and Social Services) were the right areas and that the one-week training was comprehensive and helpful. One navigator felt that the in-depth presentations from each of the four county support areas was too exhaustive and the time could have been better spent on other topics that would be more useful for the navigator position. Many respondents said there was a lot of material to master during a very intensive week and that some areas went too in-depth and in other areas not deep enough; nearly all respondents requested more training on MAXIS and FAS programs. They also saw the need for more computer technical support training if they were to continue to support computer users at libraries.

One respondent suggested including knowledge about MNSure to navigators' knowledge bank, as this was thought to be a need especially for visitors to the Downtown site. Another respondent suggested it would be helpful to cover as a training topic what the most requested needs at each location in general, since the clients and services are so site-specific. Other respondents also mentioned child support, legal/court issues, and Social Services Child Protection issues as helpful areas to cover in training. Most respondents asked for more hands-on training opportunities, like vignettes or practice examples, especially on administrative databases.

> "I think there was just a lot of information. It was very good. I think, for the most part, it did prepare me. I think part of it is just hands-on learning. I'm very hands-on training. So, I think part of it was just going there and learning as you go, which was a lot of FAS."

"I would say that MAXIS is the most difficult system to learn, especially if you're not from FAS and you're not familiar with it. So you can navigate and understand what the different panels are because a lot of time, residents are coming in downtown asking 'what's going on?'"

Ongoing Mentoring and Support

Respondents expressed concern about forgetting knowledge they did not use frequently and suggested they should receive more ongoing support beyond the one-week training. Some would like one-page quick reference guides on key topics; others wanted providing periodic refresher trainings, especially on seasonal topics like property taxes or elections, which they may only need once a year. They also requested periodic trainings on other topics not encountered as often, like Social Services programs and administrative systems that include hands-on practice.

"We need to train people and they probably need some refreshers. For example, SSIS: probably by the time somebody uses it, they're going to forget about what they learned six months ago but that's why the good thing is that we have supervisors that are very familiar... so we know that we can give refreshers and that's what we're doing. And shadow sessions, hands-on for the services we know that are more needed in the community."

"They did save the presentations and the information in Microsoft Teams, which is really hard to look up when you have somebody sitting in front of you... [we need a] two-page sheet on information about every program. I am hoping they modify that from our training."

Recommendations

Study Question 1: What have we learned in the first six months to inform and improve practices in the next two years?

Locations and Partnerships: Conduct community engagement and outreach with residents to gather their input on which locations and services are most in-demand within local communities, focusing specifically on low-income communities, communities of color, and youth who are most in need of support services. Identify and address necessary changes to the physical set-up of service centers to offer users more privacy, if needed, while still retaining the approachability of the navigator.

Explore opportunities to establish navigator services in the suggested communities utilizing partnerships with emergency shelters, and homeless and housing stabilization programs. Consider a mobile navigator team that travels to community sites on a rotating basis, including the non-profit service agencies, community centers, and city libraries. Expand navigator hours to evenings and weekends to accommodate a broader range of resident schedules.

Continue to provide and strengthen communication efforts to inform more residents about the navigators and service centers, particularly in suburban communities and working through community partners to reach marginalized residents in greater need.

Navigator Role: Ensure the navigator job description is clear and specific so that individuals recruited for the position are a good fit for the role as representatives of county services to the community. Define the roles and responsibilities of the navigator to be appropriate with the level of seniority, beyond being a greeter and/or computer cleaner. Explore opportunities to return responsibility for the computer maintenance and technology support for general users to the library staff or customer service representatives but continue to offer navigators to assist individuals seeking support to access Ramsey County services electronically, as well.

Decouple the navigator role from the service center concept. With navigator services so closely tied to service centers, the county is still doing a location-based model of services. The role should be seen separate and services offered in a need-centric way. Although navigators should remain as staff at the service centers, the two should not be considered interchangeable and navigators should also be more widely available throughout communities through the partnerships mentioned above. Each service center site has unique needs for staffing and support. Address those needs, such as computer support at libraries and financial assistance expertise, directly while expanding the navigators' capacity to provide services across a broad range of topics with enough authority to meet residents' basic needs in the four key service provision areas.

Study Question 2: What is the resident experience? How does this compare to other ways of accessing services?

Financial Worker Accessibility: Navigators can only be successful to the extent that other departments are also successful. Identify support and resources needed in FAS to ensure when a resident reaches out to them, they can get prompt assistance. This redesign initiative cannot address challenges faced by other departments through navigator services or service center provision. It can, however, highlight and bring attention to those issues so they can be addressed. Add more financial workers at the downtown location and move the navigator away from the front desk. Financial workers

can help residents with FAS-specific needs and refer people with more complex needs to the on-site navigator.

Go Virtual: Expand navigator support virtually (in addition to in-person support), coupled with adjustments to the service center model to make the centers more accessible and user friendly. Liaise with representatives in other counties and gather inputs about the benefits and drawbacks of their systems, which might be modeled and enhanced by Ramsey County. Navigators at service centers without much in-person traffic could also provide virtual support.

Library Partnership: Work in close collaboration with library management to promote effective cooperation between service center and library staff. Explore strategies to organize space that will limit disruption to quiet library spaces while promoting maximum accessibility by residents and ensuring privacy for sensitive conversations.

Study Question 3: What are the training and support needs of navigators to successfully serve residents?

Training: Revise the current training curriculum to streamline some of the more extensive content areas and include more training on MAXIS. Develop quick reference guides for each of the county support areas, so navigators have quick access to information while supporting a resident. Offer regular refresher trainings and plan seasonal trainings in the weeks leading up to an event, such as property tax deadlines or Election Day.

Appendix A: Interview Questionnaires

"Hello, I'm NAME and my role at Ramsey County is to help us use data and information to improve our programs and services. This interview is part of an evaluation of the service redesign and your input as a navigator is critical to understanding the changes and make improvements. I want to assure you that anything you say is confidential – evaluation staff do not share individual comments with anyone. The things you say will only be seen by evaluation staff. We will combine all the interviews and look for themes and patterns. If we use any quotes in our report they will not be attributed to individuals. I would like to record the interview so I can listen carefully rather than take notes. Is that okay with you? Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Navigator Questions

Talk me through a typical day for you.

> How much time do you estimate you spend with each person? What makes things take longer?

> How well do you think your time is spent? Are you too busy, bored?

> When do you escalate to a subject matter expert? Have you found this process to be effective?

> What are some common barriers to service that residents experience? How would you address those?

How do you understand your role? How do other people perceive your role? How do you navigate those understandings? Are there tools or resources that Ramsey County could provide to make your role clearer to yourself? To others?

If someone was applying for this job, what would you tell them? What do you wish you had known? Are there things Ramsey County could do to make this clearer for future navigators?

Think back to your training. Do you feel that the training prepared you for the job? How? Are there ways it could be enhanced?

You were trained on four key areas – FAS, SSD, WFS, and property tax. Are these the right areas? Was anything missing?

There are a lot of visions and ideas about what this project is. Can you tell me about your vision? What would you change to make it closer to that vision?

Navigator Supervisor Questions

Talk me through a typical day for you.

> What types of things do your staff ask for help with? Do you feel you have the necessary information to help/support them?

> What are some common barriers to service that residents experience? How would you address those?

When someone applies for the Navigator job, what do you tell them about it? What do you wish you had known when you or your staff started? Are there tools/resources that Ramsey County could provide to make this clearer?

Think back to your training. Do you feel that the training prepared you for the job? How? Are there things Ramsey County could do to make this clearer for future navigators?

What about the training your staff received? Did it prepare them for the job? How?

Your staff were trained on four key areas – FAS, SSD, WFS, and property tax. Are these the right areas? Was anything missing?

What are some things you think have been done right? What makes you say that?

Where are the biggest gaps? What needs to be done to fill them?

There are a lot of visions and ideas about what this project is. Can you tell me about your vision? What would you change to make it closer to that vision?