

Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB) Case Study: Improving New Application Approvals

Problem

The federal government requires that all agencies serving the blind to formally determine eligibility within 60 days of receiving a new application. At a recent agency Quarterly Target Review, the Oregon Commission for the Blind's scorecard indicated that over 41% of applications were taking longer than 60 days and the average was 51 days. These long delays meant that numerous newly unsighted Oregonians were having to wait more than two months to be deemed eligible for rehabilitation and job training services needed to begin the process of securing employment. The leadership team prioritized this measure for immediate corrective action and launched a 7-Step Problem Solving team.

Solution

The problem solving team conducted a root cause analysis and recommended five specific solutions to address each of the root causes. Each solution was aimed directly at specific improvements that would eliminate the most time out of the eligibility process. The solution with the greatest impact was very simple and cost effective. OCB was dependent upon a medical consultant to review the printed copies of new applications and medical paperwork once a week onsite at OCB's offices. The 7-Step Problem Solving team decided to change this process so that the medical consultant received scanned electronic copies from OCB on a daily basis, thus speeding up the review process significantly.

Results and Impact

Within the first 90 days, the number of applications taking longer than 60 days was reduced to zero, thereby meeting federal requirements for the first time. In fact, the number of days from application to eligibility was reduced to an average of 36 days. The problem solving team is now looking for ways to reduce the wait time to less than 21 days. In addition, staff productivity and morale has improved as they see how their improvement efforts lead to meaningful citizen outcomes. At the same time, the commission's leadership team has become more engaged and energized. The ROI for this project is estimated to be 30%.

Quote from the Executive Director, Dacia Johnson

"We have now proven without a doubt that we are capable of identifying our most critical constraints and initiating data-based action to remove those constraints in a short period of time. Our staff is gaining confidence in using the management system tools and has identified other important improvements they want to tackle. I am thrilled with our progress and measurable results."