



Tennessee
Department of
Human Services

Urgent assistance: Driving efficiency with call center solutions

Client Story

CHALLENGE

The Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) faced a surge in call volumes—particularly applications for emergency cash assistance—due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It urgently needed help to scale up its contact center response. It also needed help to configure and leverage Amazon Web Services (AWS) Connect technology and facilitate call taking for employees.

The state has a population of about seven million people and reported an unemployment rate of 3.6 percent in the early part of the pandemic.

Unemployment ballooned as nonessential businesses shut down because of COVID-19, leaving millions to apply for urgent assistance.



WHAT ACCENTURE DID

Accenture mobilized 25 highly skilled consultants in just four days to handle surging call volumes for Pandemic Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (P-TANF).


We utilized the transformative Amazon Web Services (AWS) call center solution. FAQs were added into the system to address the most common reasons residents were calling about P-TANF.

Our team engaged with key Tennessee DHS stakeholders and immediately created a governance structure. Initially we met with DHS leaders daily to provide performance updates. Once the project was stable, this changed to a few times a week. The governance sessions allowed us to share program performance numbers and learn how else we might add value to the DHS.

We customized existing analytics in AWS to the state's needs—DHS was new to AWS, so it had not had visibility into usage analytics and statistics. Accenture was able to add significant management value by creating this transparency.

To ease the burden on new agents during this rapid deployment, Accenture created (within 24 hours) process guides to support them. The guides enabled agents to triage issues related to login timeouts, processes and procedures, and troubleshoot account issues.





PEOPLE AND CULTURE

The result of effectively leveraging both people and technology was that, once the P-TANF call volume became more manageable, we had excess capacity available and could help the DHS handle additional call types.

We added online application support calls for the state's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and TANF benefits and added Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) on June 15, 2020.

Using some spare project capacity, Accenture offered to help in other critical areas and presented the state with 12 value-added project options to avoid leaving the extra capacity dormant. The DHS chose these three:

- A contact center assessment for the Families First service center.
- A childcare process efficiency assessment focused on improving processes and removing redundant parts of childcare applications as submitted by essential workers for pandemic childcare benefits.
- Launch of a virtual agent proof of concept with no additional investment required by the state.

VALUE DELIVERED

Accenture's work eased the Tennessee DHS contact center's load considerably by helping to optimize human resources and maximize call efficiency—leading to better customer service.

For example, average hold time was reduced from 38 minutes to less than five, and the proportion of calls answered was increased from 74 to 98 percent. Notably, FAQs created around common questions deflected 45 percent of callers who didn't require a live agent because their questions were answered by the interactive voice recognition system.

Accenture also launched "AVA," a virtual agent with 37 initial experiences (or use cases) which resulted in the DHS team being able to reallocate people to more high value work as AVA answered questions from residents. AVA has been so effective that DHS would like to continue with her after the initial proof of concept term. During the three months of the project we handled over 30,000 calls. AVA has handled more than 350,000 questions from residents and continues to operate successfully.

Additional benefits delivered to the DHS included recommendations to streamline the process for the pandemic childcare application and for the Families First contact center, such as:

- **A new operating model to consolidate support functions between the field offices and the contact center.**
- **Enhanced call routing to improve customer experience.**
- **A customer engagement strategy focused on capabilities by channel.**

