



Considerations for Implementing New Case Management Software in Resettlement Programs

Case management software has numerous benefits for organizations and clients, including unified record keeping; continuity of information among staff members; increased ability to meet compliance obligations; and increased ease in conducting monitoring, evaluating, and reporting. However, understanding what software best fits your programmatic needs and effectively implementing it can be complex.

This guide presents considerations for programs and providers when thinking about new case management software, with an accompanying sample worksheet to prioritize software options and functionality. This document is not intended to replace consultants with specialized knowledge or to recommend any specific software. Program staff are encouraged to think through their specific data collection needs and reporting requirements before exploring what reporting capabilities and data visualizations new software can offer.

A Multi-Phased Approach

Implementing a new, large-scale, agency- or program-wide software change is a complex endeavor that requires careful planning, coordination, and execution. This process can be broken down into three phases—**selection, implementation, and optimization**—which will likely take at least one year to complete. Selecting

new software requires tremendous consideration and planning to find the best fit for your programs. The implementation phase includes building out forms, transitioning or archiving existing client data, and training staff on using the system. Finally, optimization is an important phase, not to be overlooked, where glitches can be worked out and the system can be refined after a period of use.

Phase I: Selection

Prior to embarking on implementing new case management software, determining your budget and capacity is critical. With senior leadership or management approval, your program can begin the software selection process. We recommend including as many voices as possible and convening a working group representing all staff and roles within each programmatic area that will use or be impacted by the implementation of the software (caseworkers, supervisors, and program managers, as well as staff in reception, billing and accounting, compliance, monitoring and evaluation, etc.).

As an initial activity for your working group, consider having members compile a list of wants and needs for the new software that can be compared to what different software companies can offer. If your agency already has a software system, be sure to detail what members like and dislike about it. Additionally, the working group should consider the typical worker at your agency and keep their digital literacy level in mind throughout the selection process.

After this initial brainstorming is complete, have each member of the working group read through and rate the items on the accompanying sample worksheet. These results can be compiled to help the group come to a consensus on top priorities reflecting the programs and/or funding requirements. After thinking through and prioritizing these considerations, it may be worthwhile to speak with similar agencies to compare what software they are currently using and learn from their experiences. If funding allows, it can also be extremely helpful to work with an independent software consultant throughout this process.

Services like [Capterra](#) and [GetApp](#) can provide a starting point for comparing different database options. Look for the “Case Management” or “Social Work” categories.

Note: Switchboard does not endorse any individual software products or for-profit companies.

Data Management within the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Cycle

Selecting and configuring the right case management database for your program is essential for strong **data management**, the process of process of compiling, storing, and protecting data. Strong data management can help ensure the protection, accessibility, integrity, and timeliness of data.

Many software solutions provide features that help with other important steps in project monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including data collection, quality assurance, analysis, use, and reporting.

To learn more about different monitoring and evaluation steps, see the [Data-Driven, Evidence-Based Project Cycle](#).

Phase II: Implementation

Implementation is when your agency or program starts using the new software and introduces it to staff. Some critical steps during the implementation phase include the following:

- **Customization:** Customize the software to meet your program’s particular needs. Consider data that needs to be collected for funders as well as state and local regulations. Create templates and improve workflows to benefit staff efficiency in the long-term.
- **Testing:** After customization, a period of testing will help clear up any “bugs” before the software is rolled out to staff.
- **Plan for migrating or archiving data:** Create a plan for how you will keep paper files or integrate them into your new system according to state and local laws as well as the requirements of your funding stream. If you are transitioning from a different software or system, consider how you will migrate data from your old system to the new one.

(Cont’d on next page)

- **Training and rollout:** Create a comprehensive plan for rollout at a time when the agency is not overburdened with other tasks or deadlines in order to ease the transition and help create staff buy-in. Offer various training sessions, ideally with opportunities to test the software in a practice environment (not with actual client records). Remember that it will take time for staff to learn the new software, and staff with different levels of digital literacy may need additional support. Think through what types of **job aids** (such as visual step-by-step instructions or short videos) will be most helpful for staff and who will create those instructions. Consider having staff with high comfort levels in the system train as “super-users” to offer support or office hours to staff who need additional assistance.

Phase III: Optimization

Finally, optimization can take place at different intervals, depending on the needs of your program. This phase can be characterized by the following steps:

- **Create a reporting system:** As staff begin working in the software, pain points may be identified that were missed in the initial testing phase. Set up a system for staff to report “bugs” that need to be fixed.
- **Provide ongoing tech support:** Ensure that your agency has planned for ongoing tech support into the future, whether that is through an external source or internal team.
- **Check in with staff:** Take time to check in with staff a few weeks or months after rollout to see how things are going. Create opportunities for staff to share their ideas on how processes or functionality may be streamlined or improved.

Conclusion

Choosing case management and organizational software can be daunting, but when done thoughtfully and deliberately, it can greatly improve efficiency and worker satisfaction. Establishing a working group; carefully considering your program’s needs and priorities; and thoroughly following the three phases of selection, implementation, and optimization can help your program successfully adopt a new case management software.


Resources

[Creating High-Quality Case Management Documentation](#). This guide from Switchboard provides information about different types of documentation that may be included in a case file. This may be a useful starting point to consider what types of documentation your agency will capture in case management software.

[Case Note Template](#). This template from Switchboard includes important elements of a sample case note. Consider how your agency will create and embed templates in case management software.

[7 Tips for Supporting Staff Through a Database Transition](#). This blog post from the Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Assistance (META) Project describes best practices for implementing database transitions.

[Data Quality in Case Management](#). This podcast from the META Project features perspectives from resettlement agency and state agency staff.



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Worksheet: Case Management Software Selection

Instructions: Based on the needs of your role, rate each topic with a number (1–5) on the following scale: 1 = Very Unimportant; 2 = Unimportant; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Important; 5 = Very Important.

Supervisors: consider asking multiple staff in different roles to complete this worksheet, then meet as a team to discuss similarities and differences in responses. Incorporate input from as many colleagues as possible as you work to select a new case management software,

Potential Software Feature	Importance (Scale of 1–5)	Reflection Questions
<p>Access Levels</p> <p><i>Various levels of access to client information for different staff members, based on their roles</i></p>		<p>What levels of access are needed for different staff members (e.g., front desk staff, supervisors, etc.) to help keep client information private?</p> <p>Are there certain types of client information (e.g., health information, case notes) that some staff members do not need to access?</p>
<p>Audit History and Capability</p> <p><i>The ability of the software to track user actions, retrieve lost data, or revert mistakes</i></p>		<p>How important is creation of an audit trail?</p> <p>How crucial is the ability to retrieve lost data or revert mistakes?</p> <p>What are the needs of external auditors (such as funders)?</p>
<p>Auto Save</p> <p><i>A feature that automatically saves work to avoid it being inadvertently deleted or lost</i></p>		<p>How frequently are case workers interrupted by phone calls, emergency situations, or other events that pull them away from documentation?</p> <p>Has work ever been lost in the past due to a staff member not remembering to save it?</p>
<p>Built-in Screening Tools and Measures</p> <p><i>Features that allow for completion of client screenings or assessments directly in the software</i></p>		<p>Does our program require clients to receive different screenings or assessments for program eligibility or to determine if services are having the desired impact?</p> <p>Could it benefit monitoring and evaluation (M&E) colleagues and/or caseworkers if these measures were completed directly within the software?</p>
<p>Case Tracking</p> <p><i>Creating, assigning, and re-assigning cases; tracking programs clients have enrolled in; viewing client status, history, and details</i></p>		<p>What elements of a case do we need to track from start to finish?</p> <p>Could it be helpful if the software included features for assigning cases, tracking clients' programs, and viewing client status and details?</p>
<p>Cost and Scalability</p> <p><i>The pricing structure for the software, including any recurring fees, licensing costs, or charges for extra features or additional users</i></p>		<p>How many people need to use the software, and at what levels of access? How much would it cost to provide each staff member with their own individual login?</p> <p>What is the expected future growth of our organization? Might we need additional software or features in the future?</p>

<p>Customer and Tech Support</p> <p><i>Ongoing support to resolve any tech issues and to continue refining and customizing the system as needed over time</i></p>		<p>How much ongoing support will we need from the software vendor?</p> <p>How will we address emerging issues and evolving technological needs?</p>
<p>Customization and Design Control</p> <p><i>The ability to design and customize features, forms, reports, etc. within the software</i></p>		<p>Do we anticipate our needs to remain the same over time? Or will we need the software to be adaptable based on changes in programs, funding, etc.?</p> <p>Is there a staff member capable of design and customization, or will we need ongoing support from the software company? How much will that cost?</p>
<p>Ease of Use</p> <p><i>How simply designed, intuitive, and user-friendly the software is</i></p>		<p>What are staff members' levels of digital literacy?</p> <p>Could simplified workflows (with limited clicks needed to accomplish tasks) save staff time and ease implementation?</p>
<p>File Storage</p> <p><i>The ability to store documents (e.g., scans of identifying documents, benefits applications, medical and education records, external referrals, etc.)</i></p>		<p>What are our document storage needs?</p> <p>Could secure storage of client, program, or organization documents increase efficiency?</p>
<p>Integrations</p> <p><i>How the new software will integrate with other software and databases the organization uses, or those required by the funder</i></p>		<p>Could integrations minimize duplication of data entry by staff?</p> <p>What authorization would be needed from funders for any planned integrations?</p>
<p>Internal Communication Features</p> <p><i>Options such as internal chat functions, flagging and commenting on case file needs, and alerts and reminders for staff</i></p>		<p>Could features like chat and comments within the software reduce communication issues?</p> <p>What alerts or reminders for staff would be useful, and at what time increments (e.g., reminders for home visits, monthly check-ins, service plan updates, etc.)?</p>
<p>Privacy, Security, and Data Backups</p> <p><i>Privacy and security features help maintain client confidentiality and meet privacy standards</i></p> <p><i>Data backups prevent the loss of data in the event of security breaches, viruses, or server failures</i></p>		<p>How could the software help meet our standards for client confidentiality and privacy?</p> <p>Do we need a HIPAA-compliant platform?</p> <p>Do family files ever need to be separated based on situations like case separation or domestic violence?</p> <p>What mechanisms and frequency of data backup would be most helpful and fitting for our program?</p>

<p>Record Requests</p> <p><i>Capacity of the software to provide copies of client records</i></p>		<p>Do clients or others frequently request records?</p> <p>Do we need the software to print out client records or otherwise make them available, either for a specific date range or in their entirety?</p>
<p>Reporting and Visualization</p> <p><i>The reporting and data visualization capabilities of the software, including automated analysis tools, customizable reports, and dashboards</i></p>		<p>What are our data collection and reporting requirements?</p> <p>Do staff in different roles need to view different data?</p> <p>Would automated analysis tools and customizable reports be helpful, especially to meet funder requirements?</p> <p>Could reporting and visualization tools help us make decisions and improve our programs?</p>
<p>Signature Capability</p> <p><i>The ability to have clients sign documents electronically</i></p>		<p>How frequently do we need to capture client consent via signature?</p> <p>Could software that allows clients to sign documents electronically reduce paperwork? Could it make remote client consultations possible?</p>
<p>Tailored Workflows</p> <p><i>Customized user paths that walk caseworkers through multi-step processes within the software</i></p>		<p>Could tailored workflows help reduce errors and increase compliance?</p> <p>Could tailored workflows help supervisors simplify approval processes and signatures, such as those needed for cash assistance or emergency fund requests?</p>

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