The Digital Child Support Agency: From Collections to Collaboration in Child Support Services
Child support services are about children's financial and emotional well-being. That's why agencies are broadening their collections mission to strengthen family relationships. Imagine the possibilities if they combined these efforts with digital tools and technologies.

Support vital relationships
Parents with custody or visitation agreements with non-custodial parents (NCPs) receive more child support payments than those without them, according to the United States Census Bureau.\(^1\) Research also links parenting time programs and better payment compliance.\(^2\)

This connection between positive parent-child relationships and collection rates is influencing a trend of family-centered child support services. Case in point: proposed federal child support reforms include parenting time initiatives. Already, some states deliver such child support services via Title IV-D matching funds and other sources.\(^3\)

Discover the digital advantage
Digital will be a driver as agencies explore more family-focused child support services. Digital tools and technologies empower agencies to understand parental motivations and family dynamics in new ways and deliver personalized, convenient services faster. With streamlined workflows, child support agencies can realign caseworkers to focus less on transaction processing and more on relationship building.

The digital child support agency strengthens parent-to-parent, parent-to-child and parent-to-agency relationships. As research shows, strong relationships can mean healthier families, better outcomes, and higher collection rates—a win for everyone. Consider three digital hotspots for child support services:

1. **Analytics**
   Opportunity, not just enforcement
   From the purely practical to the emotionally charged, many factors influence whether NCPs pay child support. The more agencies understand them, the more they can target child support services to get the best return on investment.

   This is where analytics comes in. This is not about the “Big Brother” agency with an unchecked view of parents’ private lives. With analytics, child support agencies identify predictors of behavior and act on them quickly. Think of analytics as a tool for agencies to get proactive with parents before they have to get punitive—a game changer in child support services.

   NCP employment and collections is one area where analytics can make an impact. Child support agencies collect more money from NCPs who work. Some states are exploring the use of analytics to score employability and match characteristics with jobs in a national database. The child support agency acts as an employment counselor, helping parents understand in-demand careers and receive job listings.

2. **Customer Experience**
   Experiences, not just transactions
   Most child support agencies have an online presence, while some are more comprehensive than others. Parents can typically go online to monitor payment status and account balances, apply for services, authorize direct deposit, and provide information on an NCP’s location among other transactions.
Using the latest in user experience and service design practices, agencies can create hyper-personalized online customer experiences that go beyond one-size-fits-all transactions.

This is just what the Michigan Office of Child Support did in redesigning its online child support calculator. The calculator allows custodial parents to input income data and calculate the amount they should be receiving in child support. If their current court order is not “right sized,” they can request a case review and get a modification to their payment obligation. Getting this vital information sooner helps parents to accurately plan future household budgets. This next-level customer service approach is a powerful relationship building tool.

3. Mobility
Empowerment, not just convenience

Child support caseworkers tend to be centralized at state or county offices, largely due to data access and security issues. Even so, child support agencies can work on getting caseworkers into the field. What could be better to build relationships than making personal connections with families where they live and work?

Mobile workforce tools can make this happen. They already are in child welfare. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Children and Families distributed iPads to social workers to improve contacts, engagement and give immediate access to case information. An agency-wide survey showed that 74 percent of the workforce was comfortable with the devices and 66 percent felt more efficient using them. In addition, 87 percent of supervisors thought social workers were more effective with the devices.

Mobile workforce tools could make a significant impact in child support services too in the future. Mobile caseworkers could go into hospitals and establish paternity at birth. They could go to local events and update family data face-to-face in real-time. With caseworkers more present in communities, families will see firsthand that they do more than collect payments. They are committed to helping children succeed.

Evolve toward a digital future

Making the most of digital to transform child support services is not as simple as purchasing tools and technologies and watching the magic happen. Agencies must begin by analyzing their current processes and determining how they could be improved. With this foundation, agencies are in a much better position to move from collections to collaboration—powered by digital.

10 Ways to Apply Analytics in Child Support Services

1. Micro-segment multiple dimensions of parents’ ability and willingness to pay.
2. Join data sources to find parents participating in underground economies.
3. Determine the effectiveness of show cause/contempt remedies and others.
4. Assess which cases can be closed.
5. Broaden locate sources for non-located parents.
6. Build models to identify NCP tax fraud.
7. Determine payment scoring and arrears collection improvement for NCPs.
8. Understand why people do or do not cooperate with IV-A.
9. Improve IV-D program efficiency by staff level.
10. Use data insight to “right size” an order.
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