

Eliminating Costly Federal Fines through Improved Customer Service State of Vermont

Background: The Food Stamp program is a federally funded, state administered program.

Using a variety of criteria (i.e., income, available liquid and non-liquid resources, household size and composition, etc.), eligibility workers determine the amount of benefits due clients. If the determined amount is later found to be too much or too little, it is considered an error. When the payment accuracy error rate falls below a certain percentage (6% in 2003), the federal government fines the state government. In 2002, Vermont's payment accuracy error rate was 13%. Ouch! A leading cause of these errors was inconsistently applied rules by seasoned eligibility workers.



Challenge: Renee Richardson, Martha Laing, and Richard Moffi knew that the training was the answer, but realized that the training had to meet several critical hurdles:

- The training must be face to face with over 200 eligibility workers located throughout the state.
- The training must be geared for seasoned eligibility workers, many of whom had been doing this work for over 20 years!
- The training must be focused on food stamp errors.
- The training must be enjoyable yet practical.
- The training needed to work or Vermont was going to be fined again!

Solution: Entelechy was selected from a number of vendors due not to its knowledge of food stamps (we had none) but to its ability to create engaging, effective, focused training and its capacity to then deliver it throughout Vermont. We created a program - called Food Stamp Intensive Training - of five modules, each module focusing on a specific food stamp topic; three of the modules were 4-hour sessions and two were 6-hour sessions. The five modules were each delivered ten times throughout the state. In addition, to ensure that managers and supervisors had the capability to reinforce what eligibility workers learned, we customized Coaching for Performance and delivered it prior to any food stamp training. (See [Food Stamp Intensive Training Overview](#) for a detailed description of the program.)



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Result: The training was considered by many participants the best they had ever received. (See [What Made FSIT Work](#), a document outlining 100 design, development, and delivery techniques applied specifically to FSIT to guarantee its success.) More importantly, after delivering Food Stamp Intensive Training, Vermont's food stamp payment accuracy error rate plummeted to around 5% and Vermont has not faced sanctions since. Due to the success of FSIT, Vermont has looked for opportunities to use Entelechy for its other training initiatives including General Assistance training (another topic we know nothing about but are confident that we can craft a training solution that will be engaging, creative, and effective).

[Food Stamp Intensive Training Overview](#) and [What Made FSIT Work](#) are available free of charge by contacting info@unlockit.com.