

Making the Casebook Choice: Leading the Way in 21st Century Innovation

A New Vision for Child Welfare and Human Services: The Case Commons Approach

Data is at the heart of effective human services and case management, yet current information management systems make data difficult to track, analyze, and apply.

A significant part of the problem is that technology has struggled to keep pace with the demands of effective case management. Most states, in order to take advantage of federal financial incentives, are using outdated technology that require hours of data entry and cleaning, and a linear data structure that doesn't allow caseworkers and supervisors to choose how they organize the data so it is most useful to them. Caseworkers and supervisors have to make critical, life-shaping decisions based on fragmented, inaccurate, and out-of-date information. Agency managers lack the ability to spot trends quickly, deploy services efficiently, allocate funds effectively, and improve performance across jurisdictions.

The results are troubling. Experienced caseworkers burn out and quit, and younger workers are frustrated by the technology and quit. Too often agencies have overwhelming caseloads, allocate resources inefficiently, and struggle to distinguish between what is working and which is not. Children and families suffer without the support they need.

Casebook® is an innovative, internet-based application that uses Web 2.0 technology to transform child welfare and human services case management. Casebook is the response to years of frustration among child welfare and human service professionals and leaders who have toiled with information management systems that are difficult to use and expensive to maintain—and that fail to deliver for vulnerable children and families.

Originally developed as an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a national leader in child welfare policy practice, Casebook is designed to revolutionize child welfare and human services by providing states and localities with 21st century technology tools to help caseworkers do their jobs more effectively, enable administrators and supervisors to make smarter decisions, and ultimately better serve the children and families who need help most.

Transforming Innovation into Outcomes: Our Organization

Too often, conversations about technology take place in a vacuum. The people who design, build and maintain technology tools for human services are too far removed from frontline case management, from agency administration, and from the realities of policymaking. This means that their expertise in technology may not effectively translate to the needs of human services, despite the fact that technology decisions can have enormous impacts on day-to-day practice.

Our organization was initially funded by – and continues to be supported by – the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the leading philanthropy dedicated solely to disadvantaged children and families in America. As a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, Case Commons’ mission is to draw on the decades of knowledge, experience, and expertise developed by the Casey Foundation in order to design information technology systems that meet the needs of frontline caseworkers, improve decision making and policy, and help children and families succeed.

We work with states and localities to better understand their needs and their technology goals, and ultimately to configure Casebook in order to maximize impacts for vulnerable children and families. To do this, we have assembled a team that unites practice and technology innovators.

Our staff includes:

- **Nationally recognized experts and innovators in human services practice, policy, and management**
- **Among the best product developers, technologists and software engineers, including one of the leading software development firms worldwide**
- **Top-flight innovators in analytics and system implementation**
- **Specialists in organizational change**
- **Top designers, including a team from one of the nation’s leading design firms**



Some of our senior leaders include:

- **CEO Kathleen Feely:** continues to serve, in addition, as Vice President for Innovation at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, where she has worked for the past 20 years; formerly Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Program Development at the New York City Department of Juvenile Justice.
- **COO Heather Weston:** co-founded the Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School for Public Policy in Washington DC; initiated the E-Government Fellows program for federal and state government leaders at the Council for Excellence in Government; helped to launch the Leadership in Action Program for the Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- **Director of Analytics and Research Andrea Hollen:** over 20 years of experience in software development and information technology across the business and public sectors; commanded the U.S. Army's A Co., 123rd Signal Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division; graduate of the U.S. Army Jungle Warfare School, and Parachutist (Airborne) School.
- **General Counsel and Director of Policy Charles Simon:** has extensive experience in both law and policy. He was Deputy Director of Criminal Justice for New York State and has served in several capacities at the Department of Justice, including as Deputy Associate Attorney General. He also was an Assistant United States Attorney at the U.S. Attorney's office in Manhattan. Most recently, Charles directed public policy matters for the leading biometric airport security "fast pass" program.
- **Product Director Nicole Tecco Reece:** over 15 years of experience leading design and product development teams in both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations; began her career in broadcast media and then transitioned into non-profit strategy and operations; received her MBA from New York University's Stern School of Business.
- **Practice Director Dan Cowan:** brings his extensive background in child welfare, having previously worked as a consultant for the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Child Welfare Strategy Group, the State of Michigan's Department of Human Services and a multitude of child and family services fields.
- **Director of Training Angela Hendrix Terry:** has over 20 years of experience working in systemic change, collaborative work, and leadership consulting. She served as Chief of Staff at the New York City Economic Development Corporation and as Special Assistant to the Dean of NYU's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, where she is currently an adjunct professor.
- **Director of Engineering Jerred Cook:** has over 15 years of experience leading and deploying enterprise-scale projects. Prior to joining Case Commons, he held a lead role on the Thomson Reuters WestLawNext project. Before that he worked in such diverse fields as banking, medical, transportation, international tax, and computer aided design building both commercial software and internal IT applications. Jerred earned his Masters in Computer Science from the University of Iowa.

Together, our team members will help design information technology tools that can address your current needs and anticipate future ones.

Our philosophy is simple but unique. We believe that children and families will suffer if we do not provide the people who serve them with the best possible technology. Yet, we recognize the inherent difficulties in designing information technology systems that meet agency needs effectively and efficiently. That's why our team includes the best thinking across a range of fields: human services; technology; change management and deployment planning; analytics and design.

We recognize that technology alone isn't the answer, but it can create a powerful platform for more effective practice and policy. Our team will work to create a system that creates value for users every time they interact with it. We want to help the caseworker who is entering data just as much as we want to help the supervisor combing through a caseload to identify key trends.

Our team also understands that as your policy and practice develops, your technology needs will continue to evolve over time.

Right now, fixing and improving case management and information technology can be a real headache. Existing systems are expensive to maintain and difficult to upgrade. When states or localities want to make even small changes, they often depend on costly interventions. Casebook is a managed, hosted system running securely on our servers—not on yours. This means it's much easier and less costly to maintain and update than most existing case management and information systems.

Our staff will be able to monitor your system to automatically catch bugs, make routine upgrades, and assess how effectively your system is performing.

Information technology should enhance your agency, not weigh it down. Our team can act quickly, and won't add the overhead costs that come with an expensive maintenance staff. We employ a development approach that tests components from the very beginning, making them far less likely to encounter problems down the line. In these ways, a hosted system is "lighter" than many others.

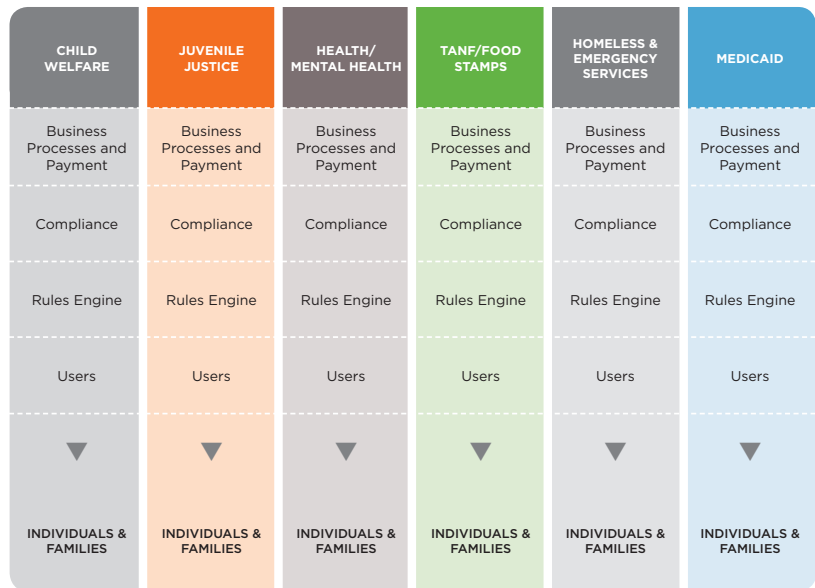
Your agency and your field will evolve over time. Casebook's technology will evolve with you.

Looking into the Future: A New Way to Serve Families

Persistent barriers presented by the many different programmatic and data silos across program areas form a common point of frustration among human services leaders.

This diffuse and segmented structure creates challenges for families, who must often navigate a maze of agencies in order to apply for and access benefits.

It also puts obstacles in the way of frontline caseworkers whose work would be enhanced by tools that help them collaborate and communicate with their peers in related departments.

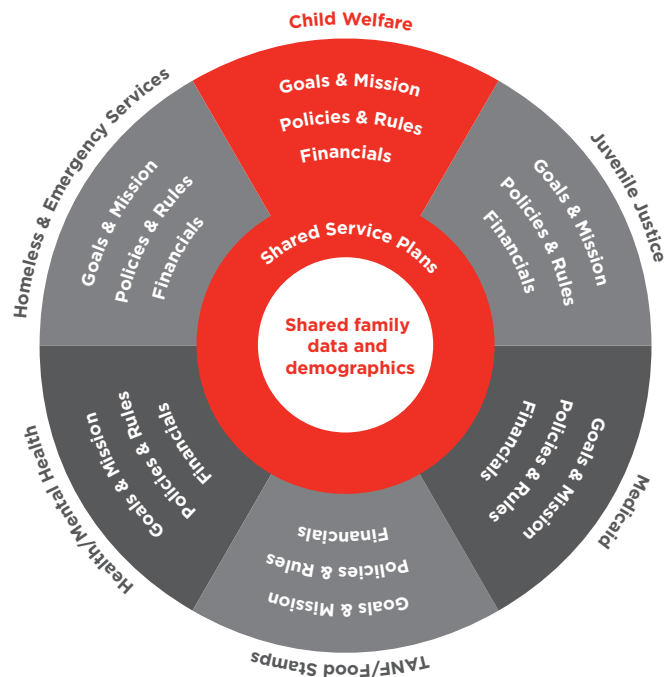


THE HUMAN COST OF FRAGMENTED SERVICES
Human Service Silos

Ultimately, this problem challenges the system as a whole. Each agency or department has a single piece of the picture, unable to fully grasp in full the realities facing an individual or family whose needs may cross into other parts of the system.

At Case Commons we believe that there is an alternative to these silos in case and data management. The web 2.0 technology embedded in Casebook can revolutionize a state or locality's approach to information. It does this by supporting appropriate sharing of family data and demographics, allowing workers in each programmatic area to have common access to the data they need.

This is about more than providing access to data across silos, but about employing common, web-based tools that multiple individuals spread across several agencies can share and use collaboratively. Caseworkers can communicate with their peers in other agencies, who can also be invited to view a case, and their communication will automatically be tagged to the case in reference. Service plans can be shared and edited by interagency teams.



A BETTER WAY
Integrated Human Services

Some states or localities may not be ready to integrate services. So, Casebook can exist as a standalone family information system for a single agency, or support multiple levels of integration with privacy rules built into the system allowing agencies to maximize collaboration without jeopardizing confidentiality. What is important for states and localities is that they have the choice and the capacity to begin integrating services when ready.

Casebook offers among the best approaches to genuine service integration currently available. That's because our approach to information management keeps unique data separate while allowing for circumscribed collaboration and information-sharing across agency lines wherever feasible, appropriate, and permissible.

If you would like more information, we can show you how Casebook can change the information architecture in your agency.

Helping You Develop 21st Century Tools: Our Process Step-by-Step

1. Understanding the Case Commons Approach
2. Learning What Technology Can Do for You
3. Defining Your Objectives
4. Designing an Engagement and Implementation Process
5. Mapping Solutions
6. Configuring Your System
7. Going Live

STEP 1 UNDERSTANDING THE CASE COMMONS APPROACH

Making the decision to change your technology infrastructure is daunting. Even a modest upgrade can take well over a year and everyone – administrators, supervisors, caseworkers, colleagues in other agencies – harbors doubts about the outcome.

Our unique role as a nonprofit, practice-oriented technology organization begins before you ever make a decision to pursue Casebook. We want to begin a conversation by helping you to ask the “big” questions.

The reality is that Casebook offers a new way of doing business in child welfare and human services—not just in the final product, but throughout the process. Our technology, approach, and development process challenge the traditional rules of technology procurement.

The first step in considering a new technology approach is to work with us to learn about and see what makes Casebook different, how our process works, and examples of our approach in action.

Who in your agency do you want defining the objectives of the case and information management system?

What if you had the opportunity to work with technologists who deeply understand child welfare and human services best practices?

What if you could react and provide feedback throughout the technology development process—not just at the beginning and at the end?

What if you could see the technology progress on a weekly basis by allowing your caseworkers to test your new system?

What if you could begin to deploy components of your new system in less than a year?

What if you could ensure 100 percent federal and state data compliance while enhancing user experience?

We want to take the time to help you understand a new definition of what's possible in family information and case management.

We recognize that a major technology transition is no easy undertaking. It takes hard work, patience, and a willingness to experiment. We'll be with you every step of the way in this demanding, but exciting process.

STEP 2 LEARNING WHAT TECHNOLOGY CAN DO FOR YOU

We believe that it's critical for all stakeholders to have an intimate understanding of the possibilities our 21st century case management tool opens up to your agency. After an initial consultation to acquaint you with our approach, we want you to meet our team. They will show you how the underlying technology can have a transformative effect on case management in your state or locality.

They'll also demonstrate how our unique and iterative product development process works. For example, before even a single line of code has been written by a programmer, our developers will already have created the test to make sure the line of code does its job.

We want you to understand these different elements, pulling back the curtain on software development so you can directly participate as we configure Casebook for you.

Because Casebook was inspired and informed directly by the need to support workers and to encourage good practice, we also want to have conversations with practitioners early (and often) in the process. In typical "waterfall development," the absence of end users participating throughout the process ultimately hampers the utility and effectiveness of the complete system.

We want our technologists to hear what your practitioners want to accomplish. That will allow us to ensure that your practice needs drive technology development—not the other way around. Casebook isn't designed for theoretical users; it's designed for and with real users.

Are we deploying programs, services and service systems where they are needed? Are there areas where services that would make a difference are not available and we need to expand the service array?

How are the families we serve changing, in terms of composition, risk/protective factors, needs, strengths, social capital and assets? How are the communities we serve changing, especially in terms of capacity to prevent child abuse and neglect?

What role can external partners and collaterals play in helping prevent removals, out of home placements and, when it is necessary, increase the likelihood of successful reunification? In helping prepare older youth as they prepare to leave the system?

Are there actions we can take to accelerate the pathway to permanency for different, distinguishable groups of children and youth?

Is there evidence of racial/ethnic disparity and disproportionality in our decision-making? If so, what can the data tell us about why? What can we do to prevent such outcomes?

Considering children who have fewer than 90 days from placement to reunification, what could we have done to prevent removal in the first place?

What is the relationship between placement stability and educational achievement or health outcomes?

What correlations are there between the composition, frequency and timing of family team meetings to outcomes?

To make good on this commitment, we have several practice specialists who will draw upon decades of combined experience to help us bridge practice and technology when we're talking to you, as well as later when we're deeply immersed in development.

Finally, we want you to meet our technologists – and our developers to meet your technologists – early in the process.

The artificial separation between technology and practice is one of the most significant problems for information management. Only through a unified conversation can we help you develop an approach that will achieve your goals.

STEP 3 DEFINING YOUR OBJECTIVES

If you decide to move ahead with Casebook, the next step is to develop a clear understanding of your business objectives. This involves first identifying some of your primary objectives for a case management system. Examples can include:

- **Workers being able to efficiently conduct day-to-day tasks**
- **Meeting federal reporting requirements**
- **Receiving appropriate federal and state reimbursement**
- **Integrating more than one human service delivery system, such as child welfare, mental health, juvenile justice, and others**
- **Collecting longitudinal data for better policymaking and practice**
- **Ensuring data is exchanged between systems in a way that doesn't hinder users**

Although we begin identifying your needs at this high level, it also goes much deeper. The bulk of our time in this stage is working with you to understand specific work processes in your agency, the range of services you want a case management system to support, the structure of casework, and whether you want to achieve service integration across multiple program areas. We know which questions to ask and we spend time finding the right answers.

This can be one of the most daunting steps, but that's why it's so critical. Having a clear picture of what you want to do will help us develop a feasible plan of action. It will also provide all parties an opportunity to identify potential pitfalls and obstacles that may crop up along the way.

STEP 4 DESIGNING AN ENGAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The next step is working with us to outline and agree to an engagement process. This involves drawing up a preliminary budget and timeline that encompasses the inventory of objectives developed in Step 3, assigning a team to configure Casebook for you, and working with you to define a working relationship among Case Commons, your agency, and other agencies or offices in the state or locality that will be involved.

This is a time for both optimism and realism. We want to create a plan that helps your agency to better achieve its mission, but is simultaneously realistic about what it will take to get there.

A critical first part of this stage includes assembling a decision-making team from your agency that includes caseworkers, supervisors, administrators, policymakers and technologists. Once we begin development and deployment, this team will be working hand-in-hand with Case Commons to make decisions about how to configure Casebook to become your new information management system. We'll work with this team to begin identifying, answering, and revisiting such key questions as:

- **What problems do you want to solve?**
- **What existing tools or approaches would you like to retain from your current system?**
- **Who will be a part of your decision-making team?**
- **What work needs to be done to engage other programs or agencies in this process?**
- **What would success look like?**

This step is critical not only for setting expectations, but also for helping your agency ready itself for change. Our team's expertise in change management, deployment, infrastructure and training will help you to think about every aspect of the new system and make certain that our development process is as integrated with your agency as possible. This close relationship will help your workers to optimize the system when it goes live.

STEPS 5 AND 6 MAPPING SOLUTIONS AND CONFIGURING YOUR SYSTEM

Once we've developed a process and timeline, we can begin mapping out what needs to be accomplished and then actually begin the work of configuring your system.

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU

It's important for us to work together to gather information about what you want to do and what you want out of your system.

CREATE A TEAM: we work very closely with you to develop the best solutions. This collaborative process requires a dedicated team within the organization – one with decision-making power and experience – with whom we can work on an ongoing basis

GIVE US ACCESS TO USERS: we build systems for users. We need their constant feedback and an open dialogue to create the best possible tools

BE CLEAR ON STATE REPORTING: we are experts when it comes to federal child welfare data reporting requirements, but we will rely on you to understand what your state needs to know

DEFINE THE ECOSYSTEM OF EXISTING TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES: we will work with you to do an internal review of your existing technology resource tools, identifying which ones you would like to keep, which ones you would like to discard, and which ones need to be rebuilt to suit your needs

BEGIN CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND SYSTEM OWNERS: these conversations will cover your existing and future Memoranda of Understanding with these organizations, including how they will or will not be modified in light of changes to your system

THINK ABOUT FUTURE USERS: think about who will be using the system and what their needs will be

BE PREPARED TO CLEAN OLD DATA: as your data is integrated into the Casebook system, some it is very likely to require a thorough cleaning effort

These steps are not sequential, but iterative. We'll work with you to translate your objectives into a concrete approach, then develop and test ways to implement that approach.

We'll then let real users and stakeholders examine and experiment with what we've done, and measure its effectiveness against your objectives.

By constantly moving back and forth between mapping and building, we'll work towards a final product that has been refined, tested, and improved over time.

Mapping Solutions

First, we'll translate your objectives and needs into a vision.

This is the customization - or configuration - phase of our work. Because we'll be working to adapt Casebook to suit the unique needs of your agency, this part of the process is where we assemble a concrete approach to what Casebook will look like for you.

Although every Casebook system is different, our understanding of how caseworkers and supervisors manage day-to-day tasks combined with our deep expertise in human services data means that your system will not be trapped in the linear structure of many existing information management systems. Instead, the interface and navigation will be intuitive, aligning with the pace and demands of real-time case management.

With a clear understanding of your objectives, we'll be able to work closely with you to configure Casebook to facilitate your agency's best work.

Among Casebook's current features—

Best-Practice Tools

- **A rich visual history of families and cases that is built automatically**, helping new teams get up to speed immediately
- **Extensive graphic visualization** to help users quickly get up to speed and manage complex relationships
- **Matching engines**, that can, for example, rank families and services to help caseworkers identify placements likely to succeed
- **Access to real-time data** to help caseworkers quickly gain a full understanding of a given family, and to allow supervisors to make decisions based on up to the minute information
- **Service plans that reflect all of the people in a family network** and the individuals supporting them
- **Support for virtual case collaboration and multiple users with different roles**, which reduces time on the phone, travel time, while encouraging collective thinking and information sharing

- **Automatic alerts, reminders, checkpoints and prompts** that keep case management on track
- **Repository for scanned documents important to the family**, such as immunization records and financial documents

Professional Development

- **Practice tips and positive feedback** to help reinforce good decisions
- **Ability to load podcasts from your training department** to address common casework problems or remind workers of “tools” they may have learned in practice, (for example, “Developmental Signs of a Nine-Month-Old Infant”)

Data Aggregation and System Management

- **The ability to fulfill federal and state reporting requirements**, including automatic generation of case overview forms and exporting of federally required data elements for selected populations
- **An approach that transcends traditional case silos** to afford a view of people over time and beyond the scope of individual cases, helping caseworkers to always see families and people rather than case snapshots
- **A tool for capturing both narrative and structured data** that prompts the user to take action that will help the family

In addition to these groundbreaking tools, Casebook has recently added a data analysis tool called Casebook Analytics, currently in its prototype phase. Through attractive, cutting-edge, and interactive data visualization and feedback, Casebook Analytics can show caseworkers, supervisors and administrators how they are doing, both at the level of an individual case and across an entire human services system.

Casebook Analytics shows data trends over time, focuses on different levels (from a single case to an entire department), and explains to users what different metrics show and why they are important.

Among the key features of Casebook Analytics—

- **Embedded Metrics:** Casebook Analytics presents data in compelling ways precisely in the context of the work that caseworkers do every day. Keeping “progress to grade” front and center, for example, can encourage a caseworker to pay closer attention to school enrollment and educational stability
- **Person- and Family-Centered:** Casebook Analytics is based on Casebook’s unique longitudinal data model. Casebook is not built around cases, but rather around individuals and relationships. This makes Casebook Analytics fundamentally different, and enables administrators to follow entire entry cohorts over time and across all services
- **Best Practice Context:** users can always see how metrics are calculated, including the quality of the underlying data. There are also built-in explanations that explain what different metrics mean and why they are important to practice

- **Predictive Analytics:** Casebook Analytics can run statistical models to deliver real-time predictive feedback to frontline teams

When presented through Casebook Analytics, data tells a story—one that can encourage conversation about improving practice among all users, even among those who are new to working with data.

Configuring Your System

Our development process is unique in child welfare and human services case management. It's fully transparent and flexible, and involves close collaboration among caseworkers, state technologists and administrators on the ground and our staff of product managers, developers, designers, and practice experts. As a result, our solutions integrate good practice, usability, and data reporting compliance.

We want to begin with a clear picture of how your workers manage their days. That's why we'll spend time watching and speaking with current users, learning everything we can about their work processes.

We employ a collaborative and iterative process that keeps us in constant contact with caseworkers and administrators. Every time we design a new element of your system, we require real end-user input from start to finish. This means asking your caseworkers to test features even in their nascent stages (such as wire sketches, paper prototypes, and clickable sequences), so we can adapt and improve as we go. We conduct similar assessments with supervisors and other administrators to ensure each new piece of the case management system helps them in their work.

When the process hits full speed, key stakeholders will receive demonstrations, select end users will test new features, and sets of teams will test simulations of real scenarios—all as frequently as once a week. Instead of investing in a system you won't see or understand until very close to the "live" date, your Casebook case management system will be prototyped and tested constantly and repeatedly, from the beginning, as we move together, incrementally, toward a complete system.

This means initial users drawn from across the state or locality will already be familiar with the system. Training, like many other elements of our engagement, is a service we provide to our clients.

Through this process, you will have incrementally built and established a training curriculum based on user feedback; supervisors will know the system fits with existing work processes; and administrators will be confident they will have the information they need to make sound decisions.

HOW WE COLLABORATE WITH YOUR USERS

Throughout our development process we are constantly working with caseworkers, technologists and supervisors within your state to help develop a system that will meet your needs.

Our process begins with extensive research. Our team will:

- Visit different types of users
- Conduct interviews with them
- Shadow caseworkers
- Take photos of different work environments in your state

This happens not once, but over and over again during the development process, helping to ensure that the tools we develop are intuitive, relevant to users and simplify what can be onerous data tasks such as validations, business rules and workflow.

Not only will this iterative approach ensure an immediate impact when your new system is finished, it will help you track progress against the timeframe and work plan you've defined. There won't be months of lag time in understanding whether individual pieces are behind or ahead of schedule. Instead, all stakeholders and participants will be able to accurately determine project status by the week.

We are also able to support a rolling "go live," deploying functional components iteratively over time. This allows you to pilot and test components to better meet your expectations and align with your needs leading up to a full "go live" date.

STEP 7 GOING LIVE

As we "go live," we'll be checking for and correcting any "bugs" or other problems that may arise within the normal range of activities and tools included in your Casebook system.

First, we have a help desk and customer support, which will not only ensure system fidelity, but will also provide us with feedback, allowing us to make improvements to the system and enhance usability.

Second, we are able to add new components that will be compatible with your system. While you may not want to change your system over time, you'll have the choice to add these new components if you believe they will help you better address emerging needs.

Third, we can work with you to enhance your case management system. This could involve broader human services integration efforts within your state or locality, or changes to your work processes. With Casebook in place, we'll have a strong foundation to work with you as you continue to innovate in the service of vulnerable families and children.

While we aim to build the perfect system, we know that, when it comes to technology, "perfect" includes evolution and adaptation over time. A lasting partnership is a fundamental part of our promise to you.

Conclusion

Investing in a new family information and case management system is among the most important decisions a state or local agency can make. It will determine the effectiveness of caseworkers. It will influence the attractiveness of your agency to a new and younger workforce. It will affect the quality of decision-making. Most important, it will help to improve results for vulnerable children and families.

Because Case Commons is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, our mission is to help states and localities make the right technology choices for children and families. Our technology, our development process, and our outlook have all been shaped by decades of collective knowledge in child welfare and human services best practices.

We want to work with you to ensure that the children and families you serve are benefiting from a system that is innovative, modern, and forward-looking. Now is the time for you to lead the 21st century revolution in child welfare and human services.

For more information about Case Commons & Casebook, please visit:
www.casecommons.org or email to **casecommons@casecommons.org**