



## Commitment to Outcomes

The Department of Family and Support Services' (DFSS) [Commitment to Outcomes](#) represents a transition to a more results-oriented and data-driven approach to delivering services – one that moves the department beyond measuring *how many* people receive services (quantity), to focus on how Chicagoans *leave better off* after receiving services (quality and impact).

In order to achieve better results for Chicagoans, DFSS seeks to clearly describe, measure, and report on outcomes; use these outcomes to support decision-making; and drive greater collaboration within DFSS as well as between DFSS and the delegate agencies we fund.

Working with the [Civic Consulting Alliance](#) and then the [Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab](#), this initiative includes four major phases to date:

- Developing a Strategic Framework: Refreshing the DFSS mission; setting and operationalizing department priorities, outcome goals, and metrics; and aligning these with decision-making procedures
- Strategic Contracting: Engaging grantees and integrating outcome goals and metrics into results-driven requests for proposals and contracts to improve services and deliver them more equitably
- Performance Improvement: Implementing a performance improvement system to prioritize and execute efforts and improve results
- System Coordination (in development): Improving service matching and referral and linking data to improve client experience and outcomes

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why is DFSS taking this approach?

People generally come to DFSS when they are experiencing a difficult situation. The efforts of DFSS staff and its partners are critical, as they work to ensure that those who receive services leave stronger than when they arrived. DFSS is transitioning to an even more outcome-oriented model that focuses on how many people leave better off after receiving DFSS's services, versus how many people come through the door.

Using data to guide decision-making and drive outcomes is a shift happening in human and social services nationally, and more funders are advocating for this approach. DFSS is at the forefront of this shift, building on best practices and lessons learned from around the country.

With a widening gap between the amount of services needed and the funding available to support them, DFSS must prepare for a future where it achieves more with less. The Commitment to Outcomes will enable DFSS to use its funds more effectively by better targeting the funding it pursues, programs it supports, and collaborations it takes on, while at the same time seeking to achieve the best outcomes for program participants.

### **How is this different from a strategic plan?**

A strategic plan typically shares detailed tactics an organization will implement in the short-term (three-to-five years). In contrast, DFSS's Commitment to Outcomes is focused on approach – developing fundamental principles, processes, and tools to guide decision-making and shifting how the department will operate in the long-term.

### **How was the Commitment to Outcomes developed?**

The Commitment to Outcomes was developed through a comprehensive process facilitated by the Civic Consulting Alliance that involved:

- In-depth interviews with DFSS staff and partner organizations
- Best practice research and interviews with human service agencies across the country
- Numerous workshops with DFSS senior staff and representatives from all divisions
- Workshops with a cross-section of DFSS's most important stakeholders, including delegate agencies (grantees), advisory councils, partner organizations, funders, union representation, the Mayor's Office, and the Office of Budget and Management

The Commitment to Outcomes is a process of course-correction and continuous improvement – as such, DFSS continues to work with the Mayor's Office and sister departments and engage delegate agencies and stakeholders to incorporate feedback.

### **How is DFSS incorporating equity into its work?**

Several components of an equity-based approach have been embedded in DFSS's Commitment to Outcomes from the start – clearly defining outcome goals and identifying the target population, disaggregating data to identify areas for improvement, and creating more opportunities for engaging with delegate agencies, for example. DFSS continues to embed an equity-centered approach throughout its work, from how services are delivered to how funding is distributed, and from how DFSS works with delegate agencies to how client data is managed. This work is evolving as we learn from best practices and leaders in the field to examine how we can integrate equity across all that we do.

## How will the Commitment to Outcomes affect contracts and programs?

The large majority of DFSS's work is achieved through partnerships with our delegate agencies, and outcome goals must be properly integrated into the department's requests for proposals (RFPs) and contracts if we are to make progress in achieving them.

DFSS received in-depth and sustained technical assistance from the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (Harvard GPL) on implementing an [outcomes-focused approach to contracting](#). Specifically, we are focused on creating RFPs and contracts that:

- Elevate department and program priorities, outcome goals, and metrics in order to give applicants a clear understanding of the problems DFSS seeks to address
- Clearly identify the target population and its needs so that service providers can focus on serving those Chicagoans that are a priority for DFSS
- Provide more flexibility for service providers to contribute evidence-based, innovative ideas about how to serve the target population and implement the intended program
- Include selection criteria and application questions focused on results and best practices so that DFSS has the information necessary to choose service providers that are most likely to help achieve the program's goals

DFSS is also implementing [Active Contract Management](#) (ACM) to better support delegate agencies in improving client outcomes. ACM is a set of strategies developed by Harvard GPL that includes reviewing real-time performance data with delegate agencies to monitor progress, generating insights on performance trends and shared challenges, and making course corrections to improve results. In particular, [DFSS's ACM work](#) has focused on improving rehousing outcomes for individuals and families experiencing homelessness and the equitable distribution of rental assistance funds. Starting in 2021, ACM will be applied to a new [service coordination and navigation model](#) for youth at a high risk of involvement in violence.

This is a work in progress. DFSS doesn't have all the answers, but has intentionally decided to be transparent and engage staff and stakeholders throughout the process, so that shaping it can be a community effort.

If you have further questions about this, please email [dfss@cityofchicago.org](mailto:dfss@cityofchicago.org).

**Updated: January 2021**