

Oregon's 'Person-First' Approach to Benefits Delivery



Summer is a carefree time for many children, but for those who rely on meals provided at school, summer can be a time of having to do with less — or going without. In early 2024, the federal government finalized the rollout of a new program to provide food to school-aged children during summer months. The state of Oregon used cloud-based tools and capabilities to provide nutrition benefits to more than 362,000 children that summer.

“When you hear a child say, ‘Does this mean we can buy apples?’ you know how meaningful the Oregon Summer EBT program is for our families,” says Nathan Singer, eligibility program director for the Oregon Department of Human Services. “This shows what can happen when we focus on the outcomes we want to achieve with the programs we deliver.”

An ambitious goal

Oregon was one of 35 states that participated in the 2024 rollout of the federal Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program, which provides \$120 in nutrition benefits per eligible child when school meals are unavailable.

After the federal government issued final rules for the program in early 2024, Oregon set an ambitious goal of serving constituents by late June — a daunting 16-week window to set up the program, reach out to inform potential beneficiaries, and establish the technology infrastructure to support the services.

State leaders recognized the need to implement a new model for the present while maintaining flexibility to navigate the future. They identified two critical needs: simplified governance to enable rapid decision-making on the people side, and scalable cloud services with built-in security on the technology side.

A collaborative effort

The state partnered with Deloitte Consulting and Amazon Web Services (AWS) to deploy a comprehensive solution for end-to-end program support. Working closely with state employees and other stakeholders, developers created three closely connected portals and a dedicated contact center.

Oregon built online portals to include a mobile-friendly application site for customers to apply, a way for Oregon school district administrators to verify and monitor enrollment, and a staff portal to support processing of cases and call center inquiries. The portals were also paired

Oregon Summer EBT by the Numbers

99% of applications submitted through the online application portal

218,000
SMS messages
and notifications
sent to families

Up to
10 languages
supported in
application,
contact center, and
marketing messages

16 weeks
from
design to
launch

96%
satisfaction rating
from call center users

33,000 calls handled by the
Summer EBT call center

362,204 CHILDREN
SERVED



with Amazon Connect, a cloud-based contact center-as-a-service solution from AWS, to provide customers with multiple capabilities, including self-service features and agent support in 10 languages.

The solution — and Oregon's Summer EBT program — launched on time and under budget, making Oregon one of the first states to issue Summer EBT benefits. Virtually all applications were completed online. State leaders initially estimated approximately 280,000 children would be eligible for Summer EBT in 2024. Because of the program's extensive outreach, state officials delivered benefits to more than 362,000 eligible children.

"We don't often talk about projects coming in under budget and on time that reach so many people," Singer says. "But it is possible, starting with strong partnerships across agencies and technical partners, then leveraging cloud-based solutions for speed and security, automating the process where possible, and using data for continuous improvement."

Keys to success

□ An all-in approach to cooperation and governance.

Oregon's human services and education departments, the governor's office, the legislature, and other key players collaborated closely on the project. All facilitated rapid decision-making. "The lack of barriers was instrumental in making the project widely successful," says Kenneth Suen, manager with Deloitte Consulting. "Highly supportive business leaders were key in enabling the managed services approach and making thoughtful decisions throughout the project."

□ **A commitment to provide a full experience.** While some states launched minimal Summer EBT programs with plans to expand functionality in future years, Oregon focused on driving extensive outreach and an easy-to-follow online application process to ensure all eligible families would receive benefits right away.

"When you typically think about implementing something quickly, you think about quick fixes, but we had the opportunity to deliver an end-to-end customer experience," says Katherine Hale, manager with Deloitte Consulting. "Thanks to great state collaboration and AWS assets, working fast and efficiently did not compromise the quality of the program."

□ **A "person-first" approach.** Communications and targeted support were provided in multiple languages, and applicants could access information and apply for benefits with their smartphones. The state also worked with community partners to understand constituent needs and

Cloud infrastructure enables rapid deployment, updates, and iterations for benefits programs.

develop targeted social media campaigns and more direct communications — including texting families to let them know they could apply. "We used the voice of our customers," says Christine Doody, Summer EBT program manager. "That was important in standing up a successful program."

□ **Cloud and AI driving outcomes.** Cloud infrastructure enabled rapid deployment, updates, and iterations. It also empowered government leaders to focus on what mattered most. "The policy team could be more involved in the technology because of the infrastructure," Singer says. "Instead of talking about zeros and ones, they could focus on policies and processes that allowed the outcomes."

Developers also deployed a variety of microservices and technologies, ranging from optical character recognition and SMS texting functionality to AI-powered monitoring tools. "There would likely be a lot of manual work for the state without these technologies — especially the innovations through AI and automation," says Naman Chaurasia, senior manager with Deloitte Consulting.

□ **A focus on continuous improvement.** The new platform enabled Oregon and its partners to "update systems in a much more quickly scalable process," Singer says. State leaders have also used data generated by the program's portals to continue to identify new outreach strategies and refine services for other benefits programs. For example, since early 2025, callers can request a text message with a direct link to the Summer EBT Online portal where families can apply, learn about the program, or access other self-service features. Additionally, the call center self-service features will be further simplified for more automation.

"This is what happens when IT, agencies, and partners come together to serve their community," says Christy Sinatra, senior communications advisor for the Oregon Department of Human Services. "Let the systems do what they do and stay focused on people getting the benefits they need."

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