What Idaho and Arizona Can Teach Us About Moving CCWIS Projects from Investment to Implementation

By Brian Delaney

After 10 years and more than $2.2 billion in investment, CCWIS modernization remains a difficult undertaking for many states. Fewer than one-third of projects are operational, and many have remained in development for six to eight years. These findings come directly from the federal government's June 2026 issue brief, "Child Welfare Technology System Implementation Shows Minimal Progress: After 10 years and $2 Billion, Modern Information Systems Are Still Out of Reach."[1]

The report describes slow progress, extended timelines, continued reliance on legacy systems, and rising costs across many CCWIS projects. Idaho and Arizona stand out not because they avoided the challenges described in the report, but because they worked through them and reached implementation. Their experiences offer a practical look at what it can take to move from planning to implementation.

CCWIS was never intended to be a simple system replacement. It was designed to fundamentally change how child welfare agencies operate. It requires states to modernize data, improve interoperability, meet federal reporting expectations, and support real-time casework decisions.

The federal findings make something clear. The challenge is not simply a lack of funding or available technology. It is the complexity of execution. In many states, new systems are being built while legacy environments continue to require significant resources, reducing both urgency and capacity to complete the transition. This is not a technical problem alone; it spans governance, procurement, staffing, organizational readiness, and the need to modernize while sustaining essential child welfare operations.

Arizona

Arizona is one example of a state that moved from planning to launch within the broader CCWIS landscape, completing the work in approximately six years. Public Consulting Group (PCG) supported the Arizona Department of Child Safety as the Planning and Project Management Office (PMO) vendor, helping guide the program from early planning through launch.

As requirements evolved, procurement decisions were made, and organizational resistance emerged; the program required consistent alignment between business leadership, technical teams, and vendor partners. It required governance that supported timely decisions and execution discipline that kept the program moving as conditions changed.

Those are the areas where large public sector programs most often slow down. In Arizona, they were actively managed. That included establishing and reinforcing decision-making structures, maintaining alignment around scope and priorities, and helping the state work through issues as they surfaced rather than allowing them to stall progress. The result was a program that reached implementation.

[1] https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/ccwis-implementation-shows-minimal-progress

Lessons from States that Reached Implementation

The federal report identifies structural barriers that affect nearly every state, including procurement delays, staffing constraints, and gaps in organizational readiness. What it does not fully explain is how some states have been able to navigate those barriers and continue moving toward implementation while others remain in earlier stages of the process. Completed implementations point to two important leadership decisions: setting realistic expectations and protecting the program from disruption.

Leadership Set and Enforced Realistic Expectations

One of the most common challenges in CCWIS implementation is the expectation that a new system should replicate every aspect of current practice. In completed implementations, Arizona and Idaho took a different approach. Arizona and Idaho made a clear decision early in the program to implement a functional, configurable product, not a fully customized system designed to mirror decades of state-specific processes. Idaho cited adoption of an existing system as a key success factor because it allowed the state to focus on improving business processes rather than replicating every legacy workflow[2]. That required leadership to prioritize what business processes were untouchable and where they could be flexible. It meant focusing on core capabilities, aligning business practices to the system where appropriate, and accepting that not every legacy workflow would continue unchanged. That direction had to be set and reinforced by leadership. Without it, requirements accumulate, complexity grows, and timelines extend.

In some programs, expectations evolved as new stakeholders engaged and competing priorities emerged. Over time, the project could shift toward a "do everything our way" model, creating tension with CCWIS's modular, configurable intent. In completed implementations, leaders maintained focus on a practical target and made decisions that kept the program moving toward it.

Leadership Protected the Program from Disruption

A second common thread was sustaining momentum over time. Because CCWIS programs span multiple years, they are exposed to leadership changes, shifting priorities, procurement delays, and other structural challenges. Arizona and Idaho planned around these risks by structuring timelines carefully, minimizing procurement-related delays, and using executive leadership to resolve resistance when it arose.

The longer a project stays in development, the more exposed it becomes to disruption. States that completed their implementations recognized the risk and prioritized forward progress.

Why These Two Factors Matter Together

These two leadership decisions reinforce each other: realistic expectations reduce complexity and help programs move faster, limiting exposure to leadership turnover and shifting priorities.

At the same time, practical goals make programs more durable. When a project is built around clear, achievable outcomes, it is easier to sustain through leadership transitions because it is not tied to a single vision or administration. Programs that lack that clarity tend to expand over time, slow down, and become more vulnerable.

The federal government has made clear that CCWIS implementation has been slow and uneven despite significant investment. The experience of states like Arizona and Idaho suggests that progress depends on more than technology alone. It also depends on realistic expectations, sustained execution, and enough continuity to reach implementation.

[2] https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/dss-build-or-buy-powerpoint.pdf)

About the Author

Brian Delaney is a Senior Consultant at Public Consulting Group who works with child welfare agencies on CCWIS modernization, Title IV-E claiming, and program improvement initiatives. Having supported states through planning, implementation, and operational transformation efforts, he focuses on helping agencies balance technology modernization with the realities of day-to-day child welfare operations. His work centers on practical strategies that help states move from vision and investment to measurable results.

Ready to move your CCWIS goals forward? PCG helps states plan, manage, and implement complex child welfare technology programs, providing the governance, execution support, and practical guidance needed to translate modernization goals into measurable progress.

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