



Lean Government

Region 10 Correspondence Management System (CMS) Process Lean Event Case Study

Summary

In December 2013, EPA Region 10 held a kaizen event to improve its Correspondence Management System (CMS) process. Region 10 receives a significant number of letters from Congress, key stakeholders, and the public each year. Incoming letters are received by the Regional Administrator's Office and assigned to the appropriate program staff using the Agency's IT system, called CMS. Responding to letters demanded a significant time investment from personnel at all levels of the organization; staff frequently missed deadlines to respond, and complex responses led to inefficient and frustrating review and revision cycles. Program offices have less than 10 business days to respond, but prior to the event, the Region achieved its deadline only 28 percent of the time and averaged a response time of 26 business days. By facilitating a faster response to more letters, the improvements identified during the Lean event enhance the clarity and timeliness of information the Region 10 office can provide to the public, and free up critical staff time in the Region's highest profile environmental programs.

Results

The new process will reduce frustration for program staff and produce higher quality responses to letters.

| Metric | Old Process | New Process | Percent Change |
|--|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| Average # of business days needed to complete a response | 26 | 8 | ↓70% |
| % of CMS requiring significant revision | 100% | 15% | ↓85% |
| % deadlines achieved | 28% | 75% | ↑47% |

**Results are anticipated based on the new process design*

Since implementation of the new process, the average response time decreased by 50 percent to 13 days, and the Region achieves response deadlines on 44 percent of correspondence. The new process reduces frustration for program staff and produces higher quality response letters. Anecdotal results indicate that revisions under the new process have been greatly reduced.



The Region 10 CMS Lean Event Team

Scope of the Lean Project

Project Scope: This project focused on the CMS process, starting with the receipt of a letter or CMS assignment within Region 10 through the mailing of a signed letter to requester. This included the Regional process for granting extensions, and records management procedures related to CMS.

The project did not include the Headquarter process for assigning CMS to Region 10 or the Headquarter process for granting extensions; nor did it include significant changes to the CMS online IT system.

Goal: Create a new CMS process that assists program staff in meeting deadlines and uses the appropriate level of Agency resources.

Objectives:

- Document the new Regional CMS process
- Develop and update standard operating procedures based on process changes identified in the Lean event
- Ensure that CMS responses comply with all applicable legal requirements and agency policies
- Establish clear protocols for records management

Process Changes and Improvements



Figure 1: Process map for the original CMS process.

Through the Lean event, the project team refined Region 10's CMS process to more quickly and accurately route assignments to the proper program office and standardize procedures to prevent bottle necks and additional levels of revisions. The new process includes the following process changes:

- A "triage" process for all incoming CMS that assigns the correspondence to a program office and classifies it as either simple or complex.
- For simple CMS (estimated 85 percent of Regional correspondence), staff will use a template to produce responses efficiently while still ensuring a high quality letter. The template will also minimize chances of common grammatical, punctuation, and formatting errors. Minimizing even small errors will prevent the need for revision.
- Simple CMS will not require a Regional Administrator signature for completion; a Regional Administrator signature will only be required for complex CMS.

- The Regional Administrator's Office will provide guidance to help staff respond to complex CMS by identifying key issues to address in the letter. This added step will prevent the need for additional revision.
- Program offices now follow a single streamlined procedure for naming and archiving electronic copies of completed letters once completed, which maximizes the ability to quickly search for and locate these records at a later time.

Implementation

The project team implemented a pilot of the triage process and response template in three program offices in Region 10 running through spring 2014. Initial results from the pilot indicate progress toward meeting the results anticipated in the future state. The timeframe to assign incoming CMS reduced on average from five business days to less than one, and the overall number of business days needed to close a CMS dropped from 26 business days to 14, with some program offices seeing their time reduced to an average of just six business days. The percentage of responses meeting agency deadlines increased from 28 percent to 58 percent. In all instances, performance improved markedly as the pilot progressed.

However, the pilot identified significant variation in process time among the regional program offices. The program office that sees the greatest number of CMS and a large amount of complex CMS continued to lag behind the future state target. Additional steps have been taken to address unique process challenges within specific program offices. The project team is also completing interviews with staff to gauge their satisfaction with the new process.

Region 10 rolled out the new process to all Regional program offices during fall 2014. The Lean project led to a separate white paper in partnership with the Office of Air and Radiation on redesigning the Agency's CMS IT application. The Region is also exploring whether Microsoft SharePoint offers opportunities to further improve challenges with document routing and version control as responses are being drafted.



Figure 2: The Lean team mapping the future process.

For More Information:

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