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"People...Do Not Come with Standardized Circumstances": Toward A Model for an Anthropology of E-Government

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“People...Do Not Come with Standardized Circumstances”:

Toward A Model for an Anthropology of E-Government

by

Marc K. Hébert

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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DEDICATION

To those struggling to access public information and services online, to the librarians and employees at community organizations who help them, and to policy workers striving for e-government program efficiency and effectiveness.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the many who supported and guided me along the way. Each member of the dissertation committee played an important part from introducing me to new literature and supporting my ideas to encouraging reflection on certain assumptions. The technicalities of this process are numerous. A great deal of gratitude is owed to both of my advisors for their patience, insight and wisdom. I am also indebted to the public librarians and employees of “HELP” and other community organizations as well as to the ACCESS applicants who gave generously of their time. While my research in Melbourne, Australia is not explicitly mentioned here, I appreciate all the research participants there as well as my host advisor and institution at the Swinburne University of Technology for what I learned that informed this work.

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ABSTRACT

Many Americans appreciate the availability and ease of using government websites to conduct their business with the state. What then of the most vulnerable in society? How do they access and use a standardized application process for government assistance, considering their potential resource, educational and physical constraints? Many go to public libraries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which shifts the responsibility to help applicants from the government agency administering the program to local actors whose primary duties lie elsewhere.

The aim of this research is to document the experiences of three groups of people, primarily located in a central Florida, urban environment, who interact with an electronic government (e-government) program known as “ACCESS.” This program is an online application for lower-income Floridians seeking food, medical and temporary cash assistance. ACCESS is part of the growth in e-government where public information and services are placed online.

The first group of stakeholders in this research is the applicants themselves who frequent public libraries and NGOs, seeking technological access and assistance with the ACCESS program. The second group is the employees at these locations who provide varying levels of support to the applicants. Finally, there are the employees of the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) who created and continue to manage the program.
The formal research process involved ethnographic methods spread over 16 months, including participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, free listing and think alouds with the applicants and those who help them at libraries and NGOs. No DCF employee agreed to participate in the research, leading to a reliance on reports either produced by DCF, or shared with them by other government agencies about the ACCESS program. The data from the above methods were used to construct a survey, administered to a largely different group of ACCESS applicants and employees at the same public libraries and NGOs.

The interpretation of findings was informed by the anthropological literature on U.S. poverty studies and public policy as well as the disciplines of e-government and design. The findings produced a model for analyzing e-government anthropologically. The model arose to fill several gaps in the literature. First, little work in U.S. anthropology deals with e-government and e-governance. Second, triangulation through ethnographic methods is not widespread within e-government research. Finally, the model demonstrates that the “audit culture” or evaluative norms and assumed ideologies of assessing e-government can shape program design, maintenance, and ultimately the experiences of users or citizens. The model is instructive and emergent, intended as a strategy to encourage further research about e-government.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This research is about Floridians who interact with an electronic government (e-government) application process for food, medical and temporary cash assistance in public libraries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The application is known as the “Automated Community Connection to Economic Self-Sufficiency” program or ACCESS Florida. The shorthand “ACCESS” is used here. The research participants included the applicants themselves, the employees at libraries and NGOs who help their patrons, and employees at the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) that designed, manage and evaluate the program.

E-government can be defined as the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as computers, the Internet and mobile phones “to integrate government information and services for citizen, business, government, and other institutional uses” (Seifert and McLoughlin 2007:1). In addition to e-government there is also “e-governance” about which a breadth of definitions exists (Dawes 2008) shaped in part by the different disciplinary background of those who research it (Scholl 2009). These definitions of e-governance contain an assemblage of political, economic and cultural ideologies that manifest through the design, creation and implementation of e-government (Chadwick and May 2003; Ciborra 2005; Navarra and Cornford 2012). For the
purposes of my research, I do not distinguish between e-government and e-governance because doing so artificially separates the government websites of policy workers from their ideologies and political aims.

**Research Questions**

There are two overarching research questions, each composed of three parts. The first question is meant to provide the perspectives and experiences of policy workers at DCF and the second question does the same for applicants and employees at NGOs and public libraries.

(Q1) What do DCF officials:

(a) *know or articulate* about the experiences of ACCESS applicants at public libraries and NGOs as well as the employees there who assist them;

(b) how do the officials *assess* these experiences, and

(c) *address* the challenges of applicants and employees with ACCESS?

(Q2) How do ACCESS applicants and those who assist them at public libraries and NGOs:

(a) *articulate* and

(b) *assess* their own experiences, and

(c) *address* their challenges with the application process?

The findings from both research questions will be used to advance an anthropological understanding of e-government, detailed in the penultimate chapter.
Background

The research began at an NGO with the pseudonym “HELP” located in an urban area in central Florida, known anonymously as “Anora County.” I started volunteering at HELP as part of an urban poverty graduate course. My duties involved assisting high school students with learning information technology and preparing for postgraduate education. Taped to HELP’s door was a faded piece of white paper that read “ACCESS Florida.” It was not long before I inquired about the acronym and learned about the ACCESS program and DCF.

Lower-income Floridians use ACCESS to apply online for three government funded social services: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as “food stamps;” healthcare or Medicaid; and eligible pregnant women can also receive temporary cash assistance. As someone who used to work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, I was familiar with the Food Nutrition Service, which oversees SNAP. Additionally, my interest in urban poverty, technology and public policy left me curious about people’s experiences with ACCESS. A literature review revealed that very little ethnographic research within and outside of anthropology had been done about e-government in general and the experiences of lower-income U.S. residents in particular. Further, I found through my volunteering that applicants’ challenges with ACCESS were more wide-ranging than described in the literature.

Prior to formal data gathering, I reached out to management in the Anora County library system as well as employees at HELP to learn how my research might be of value to them. I asked what I should look for that could be of interest.
They were primarily concerned with better helping their clientele. A focus on
issues of design grew out of this concern to improve the way patrons of libraries
and NGOs interact with the ACCESS application process.

**Literature from Anthropology, E-Government and Design**

The literatures from anthropology, e-government and design informed the
research questions and were used collectively to discuss the findings. The
anthropological literature that critiques U.S. poverty and public policy provided
most of the theoretical concepts for the discussion. The e-government literature
offered largely methodological insights into a cross-disciplinary field where
survey-based research is the norm (Heeks and Bailur 2007) but qualitative
research is increasingly valued (Gil-Garcia 2012). The design literature helped
me to understand better how nuances in the layout of the ACCESS website and
DCF user feedback form can influence applicants' experiences. This literature
also offers new areas for anthropological critique and suggestions for improving
the public's experiences with e-government. Additionally, there is literature from
the field of public administration that adds balance to the critiques offered from
anthropology, as well as literature from library and information sciences that
demonstrates how librarians have been grappling with public policies that strain
their resources, particularly to help lower-income populations.

I reviewed the anthropological research on information and
communication technologies (e.g., Internet, computer and mobile technologies)
prior to and during data gathering. The literature appeared to me as being more
g geared towards answering, “What is technology?” and “What does technology
mean to my research participants?” (Batteau 2010). They are important questions in their own right, but are expansive and overextended the scope of my research. Moreover, such questions can position technology as a given: that is, as an artifact to be examined, without interrogating the process by which any particular manifestation of technology takes form, and how this process of design is deployed and exerts effects on its end users. I approached technology by focusing on how the design of the ACCESS website and the technical process of applying is experienced and what it says about public policy and the treatment of lower-income populations.

I found it more helpful to ask, paraphrasing anthropologist Daniel Miller (2008:1122), “What does the design of technology do to my research participants?” This offered me a finer grain, analytical approach to understand research participants’ experiences through “design thinking” (Kimbell 2011b). That is, to ask what information is included or left out of a technological application process, how might the ACCESS website be designed to “nudge” human behavior in predictable ways (Thaler and Sunstein 2008), and does the design of DCF’s user feedback form adequately account for the most important aspects of applicants’ experiences? These sorts of questions overlapped with my theoretical critiques of ACCESS and e-government, which like design, are not neutral but are rather used purposefully for political aims.¹

¹ “Political” does not mean “bad” nor are evaluations and the design of services having political objectives something reserved for policy workers. Anyone engaging in the evaluation and design process can be said to have political and ideological pursuits.

² Public administration scholar John Clayton Thomas (2012) argues that
Further, unlike the analytical approach of anthropology that privileges the holistic critique, design prioritizes the deliverable. That is, it necessarily produces a thing, service or space. By finding weaknesses within a program, designers must offer viable solutions and even create and test them among users. For anthropologists, this means design can be used to strengthen an applied approach to data gathering and analysis.

Overall, the literature review indicated gaps that my research attempts to fill. The first is that few anthropologists have researched e-government programs, and those who have did not engage with the e-government literature (Lopez 2005; Mulligan 2010). The dearth of this literature opened new possibilities of analysis, leading me to employ design as a trope to analyze the ideological aims of management at ACCESS. These aims manifest in the online artifacts they use to provide welfare services and evaluate their clients’ user-experience. Finally, e-government researchers tend to favor a positivist approach to data gathering and analysis (Andersen, et al. 2010; GAO 2011; Liu, et al. 2010; Osman, et al. 2011; UN 2012) rather than a critical approach, which I offer here. By positivist, I mean research that is not explicit about its political, cultural and economic histories and implications that heavily relies on quantitative measures assumed to be objective or value neutral (Guba and Lincoln 2005:193). The critical approach I used considers those overlapping histories, implications and values as well as the assumptions of qualitative and quantitative methods.
Methods

The ethnographic approach I followed developed from informal to formal data gathering and analysis (Agar 1996:183-184). I began my research as a volunteer at HELP in 2007 by asking questions about the ACCESS program. I gradually shifted my volunteer duties in 2008 into 2009 from assisting the youth at night with computer instruction and college preparation to helping ACCESS applicants during the day. HELP management welcomed my plans to conduct research formally. I then approached officials in the County library system who also authorized my research. I received approval in 2009 from the University of South Florida’s Institutional Review Board to conduct research, in part, based on letters of endorsement from the leadership of both HELP and the library system.

I had also been conducting archival research since 2008 to understand the perspective of DCF management about its program and the public’s experiences with it. A more expansive review of the anthropological and e-government literature followed and a research proposal emerged in 2009. Formal research began the same year through a purposeful sample selection when I returned to HELP to document how applicants and staff members interacted with ACCESS. I conducted semi-structured interviews with a key informant at HELP. I asked this individual, other staff members and applicants as well to “free list” or itemize all the challenges individuals face with the application process. I also requested applicants to “think aloud” while completing ACCESS online, expressing their thoughts about their experiences and the design of the application itself.
I went on to conduct semi-structured interviews and free lists with employees at other NGOs and at libraries. I conducted no interviews with applicants at HELP or any other NGO and only had brief interviews with them at one library. This was unexpected. The applicants explicitly communicated to me they had little or no time to be interviewed, but yet made time to participate in other methods.

Unable to secure interviews with DCF management in Tallahassee and in Anora County, I garnered their perspectives about ACCESS from reports that they wrote or helped produced, reports conducted by third parties, and two datasets that an internal DCF research office provided me upon my request. The first dataset was from their optional user feedback form that applicants might complete after submitting their ACCESS form online. The second dataset dealt with DCF “Community Partners” or organizations that agree to help the public with ACCESS. Specifically, these data were about which type of organizations are community partners, such as public libraries, for-profit and nonprofit organization.

In 2010, I analyzed the data from the free lists (n=28), interviews (n=20), think alouds (n=8), and eight months of field notes from participant-observation as the basis to create an online survey (n=99) with more than 70 questions completed by applicants and employees at public libraries and NGOs. I visited NGOs (n=17) in the County requesting their assistance to complete the survey. These visits also allowed me to document the range of office space, technology and assistance available to applicants. I pretested the survey among applicants
at an NGO (n=3) and a library (n=3) as well as by an employee at a library (n=1), NGO (n=1) and university colleagues with graduate degrees (n=2). The last respondent completed the survey in early-2011, capping 16 months of formal data gathering.

Findings

The four findings discussed here answer the research questions and also serve as guideposts or recurring themes. The first finding is that applicants mostly praised the program. Their self-reports, however, contrasted sharply with the assessment of ACCESS by employees at public libraries and NGOs as well as my own participant-observations. I speculate as to why this occurred by drawing on the work of sociologist Erving Goffman who examined how people present themselves to others (Goffman 1959), theorizing that the potential for embarrassment during these interactions can influence what people may share about themselves (Goffman 1983).

From my vantage point, the complexities of applicants' lives as well as the resources available to them at libraries and NGOs are not standardized and present different constraints, strengths, and needs that do not easily fit within an automated application process. The discrepancy between observed and self-reported data speaks to the prevalence of informant inconsistency and the value of triangulating findings through different ethnographic data gathering techniques (e.g., interviews, participant-observations, think alouds, etc). While comparing findings from ethnographic methods is common in anthropology, it is less widespread in the e-government literature (Yildiz 2007) or among government
agencies assessing the user-experience of their online services (ForeSee 2012; Nazi 2010).

The second research finding is that the reasons ACCESS applicants liked the program mirrored the explanations provided by DCF officials, namely that it saves time, money and effort (Cody, et al. 2008; Lange 2009). These findings complement the e-government literature that frames e-government as an efficient “service delivery” device with the conspicuous absence of mentioning it can also serve to improve democratic participation (Navarra and Cornford 2012:37). I call this “taxpayer citizenship” or a view that government’s primary role is to manage public funds efficiently and judiciously. The alternative view of citizenship included here is known as “social citizenship” and it prioritizes government’s moral obligation to the citizenry and its role to foster civic engagement and social cohesiveness beyond the utility of providing services (Fraser and Gordon 1992, 1994).²

The third finding mentioned here is DCF primarily addressed the challenges applicants have with ACCESS by devolving its responsibility of welfare accessibility and its associated costs to local actors. These include public librarians, NGO staffers and the applicants themselves, who often turn to friends and family for assistance with the application process. Librarians and the e-

² Public administration scholar John Clayton Thomas (2012) argues that policy workers should go beyond the dichotomous role of viewing the public they serve as either “citizens” who shape the policy making process or “customers” expecting services in a respectful and timely manner, but also “partners” who assist in policy implementation. These roles overlap as does “taxpayer” and “social” citizenship, but my argument is that these two views of citizenship appear difficult for program administrators in e-government welfare programs to reconcile when designing and managing them, including ACCESS.
government literature described this practice as an “unfunded mandate” (Gibson, et al. 2009:8). Anthropological research about e-government is sparse (Lopez 2005; Mulligan 2010), but comparable literature addressing welfare policy critiques the devolution of responsibility as a “neoliberal” practice (Goode and Maskovsky 2001b; Kingfisher 2007; Morgen 2001). “Neoliberalism” is also known as “advanced capitalism” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012) and “New Public Management” (McLaughlin, et al. 2002; Navarra and Cornford 2012). It can be defined as “the re-embbrace of classic liberalism’s faith in the economic, social and moral attributes of unhindered competition and unregulated markets in the current context of welfare state retrenchment” (Goode and Maskovsky 2001a:8). Neoliberal policies can lead to privatizing, outsourcing and devolving government oversight (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Morgen, et al. 2010; Robotham 2009, 2011).

My last finding is to conclude that DCF’s approach to assess the experiences of applicants and Community Partners is problematic. The evaluative instruments DCF uses either have poorly written questions or do not accurately measure people’s experiences with the ACCESS program. DCF officials appear to use these findings to generalize to the broader population (Lange 2009) even though the data lack external validity. That is, they are not random, representative samples of the applicant population that can be used statistically to generalize about their experiences. Moreover, examination of DCF’s “audit culture” (Strathern 2000) or evaluative practices revealed a privileging of efficiency over effectiveness. This privileging corresponded with an
ideology of taxpayer citizenship, the dominant sentiment as to why research participants liked ACCESS, and the primary reason why DCF created the program.

These findings follow a broader critique in the anthropological literature on U.S. poverty and public policy, specifically that evaluation and enumeration in government programs are not value neutral tools (Shore 2008; Strathern 2000). They are rather what French philosopher Michel Foucault (Foucault, et al. 1988:77) described as “political statistics” deployed strategically for ideological aims. Moreover, the ACCESS program itself is an assemblage of cultural-economic-political ideologies that research participants experienced in different stages of the application process.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into ten chapters, beginning with the introduction in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 is a review of the pertinent literature from the anthropology of U.S. poverty studies and public policy as well as from the fields of e-government and design. Chapter 3 includes a brief history of the ACCESS program, the differences between the one-time “caseworker model” and today’s “self-sufficiency model” (Cody, et al. 2008), and a summary of the stages of the ACCESS application process. These data are based on reports DCF management wrote, collaborated to produce, or were shared with them by another government agency. As a result, this chapter answers a part of the first research question, namely what DCF knows or articulates about applicants’ experiences.
Chapter 4 describes the methods of data gathering as well as the two primary field sites, specifically one library and one NGO. Chapter 5 presents the data gathering results, thereby answering the second research question: How do applicants and employees at public libraries and NGOs articulate and assess their experiences with ACCESS, and address their challenges with the program? Chapter 6 analyses these experiences by applying anthropological theory about U.S. poverty as well as methodological concepts from the field of design.

Chapter 7 presents findings from two datasets gathered by DCF. The first dataset offers an overview of which organizations are in the Community Partner network and what they are paid, if anything, for their services. These data represent how DCF leadership addresses applicants’ challenges through a largely volunteer organizational infrastructure. The second dataset includes six years of monthly data – January 2006 to January 2012 – from the optional user feedback form, which applicants can complete after submitting ACCESS online. This dataset is meant to show how DCF management assesses applicants’ experiences with ACCESS. The findings from both datasets answer the remainder of the first research question. Chapter 8 analyses DCF’s evaluative practices using concepts from the anthropology of policy as well as design methodology. The inconsistency between research participants’ self-reported and observed data will be addressed here as well.

Chapter 9 synthesizes the findings from the first two research questions to advance a model for analyzing e-government anthropologically. The model contains theoretical and methodological elements that arise in each chapter.
Every attempt is made throughout the dissertation at explaining what these elements are and how they contribute to the model. This penultimate chapter gathers each of these elements and describes their contributions to the model. No claim is made of the model’s completeness; it is rather to explicate and spur further investigation. The goals of the model are to make the discourse and techniques of the field of design more approachable within anthropological inquiry, and to develop an anthropological understanding of how historically marginalized populations experience e-government. Finally, Chapter 10 offers concluding remarks, policy recommendations, reflections and an epilogue.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The literature reviewed here offers theoretical and methodological concepts to explain the methods chapter and to organize and analyze the data in the subsequent chapters. The concepts also build towards a model for analyzing e-government anthropologically, elaborated in Chapter 9. As anthropological theory and methodology have great breadth and are influenced by other traditions, only the literature that directly shaped my thoughts and ideas throughout the research process will be covered here. This literature review also serves to assess what else has been written about e-government within anthropology and within e-government anthropologically, which to the best of my knowledge is very little.

The organizing principle of this chapter is to ask – borrowing from anthropologist Daniel Miller (2008:1122) and Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire (2004:86) – “What do government evaluations do, for and against whom and for what aims?” Emphasis will be placed on the cultural, economic and political assemblage of ideologies within the evaluative practices of federal and state policy workers, particularly around welfare programs. As a result, anthropological treatment of poverty and public policy has largely influenced my thinking in addition to the pertinent literature from the fields of e-government, design, public administration as well as library and information sciences.
Structure, Agency and the Personal Responsibility Narrative

The theoretical axis of agency and structure frames much of the U.S. poverty studies literature, especially how people experience welfare and the process of applying for it. “Agency” can be understood broadly as “human will” often in contestation with structure and power (Hathaway and Kuzin 2007; Ortner 1989). Sociologist Anthony Giddens (1985:170) described agency as “the capability of actors to ‘make history’ [...whereby this capacity] is variable across time and space.” Many non-anthropologists, including some policy workers, identify agency or “personal responsibility” as the cause of, and solution to, poverty (DeParle 2012; Mead 1986, 2007; Moynihan 1965; Murray 1984, 2005; O'Connor 2001; Wilson 2003). Conversely, one cannot analyze agency without considering "structure," meaning the external or supra-corporeal influences of a political, economic and cultural nature. Structures for anthropologists are commonly attributed with perpetuating poverty and creating vulnerabilities for those in it, including when people are applying for or receiving public assistance (Davis 2003; Greenbaum, et al. 2008; Morgen, et al. 2010).

Anthropologists have used the concepts “structural violence” (Farmer 2003) and “structural vulnerability” (Holmes 2011) to communicate to healthcare practitioners outside of anthropology the unapparent, structural causes of

3 Anthropologist Laura Ahearn (2001:112) has challenged this definition of agency by asking, “Must all agency be human? Can nonhuman primates (Small1993), machines (Pickering 1995), technologies (Dobres 2000), spirits (Keane 1997, pp. 64–66), or signs (Colapietro 1989, pp. 95–97; Peirce 1955) exercise agency? Must agency be individual, leading to charges of unwarranted assumptions regarding Western atomic individualism (Ortner 1996)? Or can agency also be supra-individual—the property, perhaps, of families, faculties, or labor unions?”
sickness, particularly among historically marginalized populations. Structural vulnerability calls attention to the macro-level forces shaping the experiences of e-government users, such as political and economic ideologies that shape how government programs are designed and experienced by the public. I also use structural vulnerability to discuss the micro-level structures in the design of e-government websites to which the public is also vulnerable.

The Official Definition of Poverty

Competing ideologies along the agency–structure axis correspond with different definitions of poverty between policy workers and anthropologists in academia. The way in which the U.S. federal government measures individual household income, family size and the price of food determines the official definition of poverty (Fisher 1997; Institute for Research on Poverty 2008; Orshansky 1977). The measure is presented as an ideologically sterile, evaluative instrument in the U.S. Census Bureau report that publishes it annually (DeNavas-Walt 2011). "While policies may be clothed in neutral language — their ostensible purpose merely to promote efficiency or effectiveness — they are fundamentally political," asserted anthropologist Janine Wedel (Wedel, et al. 2005:33-34). No explicit mention of ideology in the official definition is itself an ideology. Further, an assumption within the ideology of the official definition of poverty is that economic markets provide capital to those who work for it and the supply and demand of goods and services generally function appropriately within a market system (Haveman 2008:7).
Using an absolute measure of poverty distinguishes the United States among other developed countries, according to the United Nations (2010:45):

[M]ost rich countries (with the notable exception of the United States of America), have shifted to an approach entailing relative rather than absolute poverty lines. Those countries treat poverty as a proportion, say, 50 or 60 per cent, of the median per capita income for any year. This relative measure brings the important dimension of inequality into the definition. [...] It is clear that these shifts of focus in discourse and practice—from absolute poverty to relative poverty, from income poverty to dimensional analysis, from poverty to well-being, and then to social exclusion—have profoundly altered the way deprivation is conceptualized, defined, measured, analysed, addressed and monitored.

There are at least two key cultural-economic-political ideologies mentioned above in measuring and thereby defining poverty. The first is in relatively affluent countries besides the United States, public officials and the societies to which they belong conceive of poverty in relational terms. That is, poverty is defined according to the median income level or where about half of the population is living. This speaks, in part, to the views of these citizens that economic markets do not always function effectively or at least not everyone in society can compete equally. Alternatively the U.S. measure of poverty is based instead on food costs and family size (Haveman 2008:7). This measure instead determines poverty according to a narrow view of the cost of living rather than comparing income levels with the rest of the population.

The second ideological insight when differentiating between the U.S. approach to measuring poverty and other developed nations is that the actions of the latter appear to acknowledge structural factors are at least as influential as individual merit in shaping one’s material well-being, if not more. This worldview corresponds in the U.N. report with moving “from income poverty to dimensional
analysis" of the vulnerabilities and lack of equal opportunities for individuals to overcome poverty. Further, the idea of "social exclusion" in the U.N. report speaks to the role of structures not the individual in determining one’s ability to participate in society, including materially (Sen 1999). The official U.S. approach to measuring poverty, however, correlates strongly with a widely held belief among Americans that poverty often results from poor individual choices (DeParle 2012; Goode 2010; Gordon 1994; Susser 1996). Conversely, success is earned through hard work or striving for the “American Dream,” defined as the fluidity of social mobility in the United States by anyone with sufficient gumption (CNN 2008; Obama 2006).

The American Dream as a Cultural Ideology

An early and popular supporter of the American Dream was Horatio Alger, a 19th century novelist, who popularized the Dream through publishing more than 100 books and selling more than 20 million copies (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2008). A common ingredient throughout his novels is success through happenstance: when someone who is poor assists someone who is wealthy and powerful, receiving pity or admiration of a benefactor who then helps the poor person to rise out of poverty (Nackenoff 1994:139; Vlahakis 1979; Zuckerman 1972). The following passage illustrates this narrative from the Tampa Bay Times newspaper:

Back at Metropolitan Ministries, Joy Gallant said she felt like her luck was finally turning around. For the first time in three years, Gallant spent Thanksgiving with her 3-year-old son, Aaron, and 6-year-old daughter, Faith. Her children have been in foster care and the family is in the process of being reunified, she said. "I just want to cry every time I think about it," said Gallant, 33, who described herself as "chronically homeless." She said she recently graduated with a certificate as a behavioral health
technician and won a $5,000 scholarship to continue her education. Gallant says she plans to use the money toward earning a bachelor's degree in addiction science. "Things are absolutely fabulous," Gallant said. "I'm going back to school, and soon we're going to be a self-sufficient family" (Graham and Levesque 2008:15)

The key ingredients of happenstance (e.g., winning money to continue her education) and hard work (e.g., finishing her technician certification) are part of the narrative. Embedded in her narrative is a third component: the idea that a homeless person should strive to be "self sufficient" or demonstrate "personal responsibility." Lower-income populations and members of the broader public can internalize the concept of “self-sufficiency” and “personal responsibility” through a narrative that policy workers frequently use to frame poverty (DeParle 2012). Internalizing dominant discourses such as these extends the reach of the state and can shape how the public perceives citizenship or their relationship to government (Crehan 2002; Foucault 1991).

Taxpayer and Social Citizenship

I use the term “taxpayer citizenship” to define a relationship between citizen and government from largely a fiduciary lens (US Congress 2012b). Describing citizens as “taxpayers” is commonplace among federal (US Congress 2012b; USDA 2010) and state officials (DCF 2011c) as well as the popular media (NPR 2012; Washington Post Editorial 2008) and in the public administration literature (Kettl 2002). This view of citizen–government relations is more concerned with individual culpability than structural vulnerability. It is a citizen-government relationship branded by a preoccupation with efficiency and evaluation of public services. There is value in viewing citizens as taxpayers for whom public officials should spend tax dollars wisely, transparently and
democratically. However, I find the concept in popular discourse to be largely silent about the necessary social and moral obligation of government towards its citizenry. A taxpayer citizenship view of welfare policy is primarily concerned with determining who is most deserving of public assistance.

Political scientist Anne Daguerre (2011:390) described how the U.S. welfare system has been divided into two tiers since the passing of the Social Security Act in 1935. Social Security Insurance (SSI) programs pay money to people who have retired from work or are on disability. Daguerre says these recipients of public assistance are depicted popularly in society as being more deserving as their benefits are “based on work history, not current income level” (Boushey 2004:30). These recipients of government aid differ from those receiving SNAP and Medicaid – seen as lower-tier welfare – which require eligibility criteria based on income and wealth. While recipients of SSI without a work history may also be considered non-deserving because of addiction or substance abuse issues, in general, eligibility based on household income in the U.S. welfare systems marks a lower-tier. Researchers have compared the experiences among welfare recipients between the two tiers and found recipients in the upper-tier felt more respected and less ashamed when interacting with caseworkers and other government employees than those in the lower-tier (Soss 1999).⁴

⁴ Public administration scholar Charles Goodsell (1994) reviewed survey research of people’s experiences with welfare and other government services. He found that research participants reported being satisfied with their experiences, though he offered no research of people’s experiences with public services based on participant-observation.
Besides taxpayer citizenship there is also “social citizenship” (Fraser and Gordon 1992; Gordon 1994). Social citizenship, however, is where government is supposed to advance opportunities for all members of society, enabling individuals to have sufficient resources to negotiate political, cultural, environmental and economic structures. The idea here is that when any segment of the population suffers or lags, then it affects the rest of the population. Society advances together, not individually, from this perspective. The antecedents of social citizenship are in political philosophy (Curtis 1981), and the idea is established in the poverty studies literature (Hyatt 2011; Morgen and Maskovsky 2003). I use social citizenship to prioritize government's moral obligation to the citizenry, its role to foster civic engagement and to balance government program efficiency with effectiveness.

An Anthropological Definition of Poverty

Rather than defining poverty through an evaluative, purportedly value neutral instrument, anthropologists Judith Goode and Jeff Maskovsky (2001a:3-4) describe it “as a political, economic and ideological effect of capitalist processes and state activity... as a function of power... explained in terms of three interconnected processes – economic polarization, political demobilization, and market triumphalism.” This definition shifts the cause of poverty away from the individual pathology and towards the political and economic ideologies that shape structures and people's personal agency. Ideology is important in the anthropological definition, in recognizing that power and hegemony are working on the consciousness and bodies of citizens (Bourdieu 2000; Crehan 2002;
Foucault 1978, 1979; Freire 2000). Moreover, this understanding of poverty lends itself to ethnographic analysis to examine the effects of welfare policies (Greenbaum 2002; Kingfisher 2007) and the subjective ways in which lower-income people experience it (Lipsky 2010; Morgen, et al. 2010; Soss 1999).

Goode and Maskovsky's definition critiques policies described within the anthropological literature as “neoliberalism” (Allison and Piot 2011; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Ong 2007). It is also known as “advanced capitalism” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012), “New Public Management” (McLaughlin, et al. 2002; Navarra and Cornford 2012), and “Big Society” (Collins 2010). Neoliberalism can be defined as “the re-embrace of classic liberalism’s faith in the economic, social and moral attributes of unhindered competition and unregulated markets in the current context of welfare state retrenchment” (Goode and Maskovsky 2001a:8). The effect of neoliberalism on government employees has been an attempt to make publicly funded programs more efficient, like a business, by using evaluation to demonstrate efficiencies, particularly cost reduction, to their superiors and taxpayers alike (GAO 2011; Strathern 2000). A principal way of attempting to achieve efficiency has been to devolve central government oversight and administration of programs to state and local levels, including public libraries, NGOs and ultimately the individual citizen.  

5 Devolution also happens because of federalism where local actors are thought to be best suited to develop solutions to community problems (Soss et al., 2001). Federalism is also tied to ideological beliefs in sharing / contesting power between federal and state government (Gormley 1989). These reasons raise questions, however, as to whether state and local governments are able to implement devolved policies effectively based on existing budget cuts or resource constraints (Sosin 2012).
of the 1996 welfare reform act, PRWORA, offers an example of policy workers focused on evaluating efficiency and encouraging the devolution of federal oversight.

**PRWORA and the Imperative of Evaluating Efficiency**

PRWORA introduced the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant of $16.5 billion to U.S. state governments (Haskins 2006:364; US Congress 1996::2177). TANF heralded an important shift in welfare policy by permanently allowing states to create their own solutions for local poverty as long as they abided by federal requisites. Chief among these requirements included measurable data that people are moving from welfare to work in 24 months and mandating a 60-month lifetime limit on most welfare recipients (De Vita 1999; Handler and Hasenfeld 2007; Haskins 2006; O'Connor 2004; Stricker 2007).

Evaluating efficiency became the core of PRWORA four years prior to its enactment when the District of Colombia and 43 states received federal exemptions from administering welfare, allowing them to implement experimental programs that had to be evaluated (Grogger and Karoly 2005:20,34). Evaluation was fundamental in demonstrating the success of these programs and their future adoption nationwide. Many of the pilot programs focused on “work first” paradigms (O'Connor 2001:289) that emphasized quantitative evaluative models of how quickly welfare applicants could find any job in order to remove them from welfare. Anthropologist Frances Riemer (2001) documented the experiences of welfare to work participants who appeared trapped in low-wage purgatory.
The effectiveness of welfare to work was not defined as the public’s satisfaction or their accessibility or usability of these programs or whether employment corresponded with career goals. Instead, effectiveness was largely synonymous with efficiency, that is, achieving cost-savings to taxpayers. Moreover, the pressure on government employees to demonstrate program efficiency coincided with their approach to working-class jobs as being interchangeable (Grogger and Karoly 2005; Handler and Hasenfeld 2007; Stricker 2007). That is, the jobs appeared relatively equal in aptitude and in the capacity to provide sufficient motivation to clients not to seek welfare again. The standardizing process to evaluate and find people jobs proved more “successful” or efficient than educating welfare recipients towards a self-chosen profession (Grogger and Karoly 2005:34; Handler and Hasenfeld 2007:197-199; Stricker 2007:216-220).

The evaluative mechanisms and models for work first welfare programs eventually demonstrated that “low-cost, immediate placement programs did little to raise earnings and job security for the poor” (O'Connor 2001:289). Over emphasis on evaluations to show high numbers of jobs without analyzing whether low-income people could afford housing, food and transportation from their minimum wage employment further underscored the inability of welfare reformers to conceive of lower-income people as complex beings rather than mechanistic entities. Experimental welfare programs by states provided the necessary data to demonstrate onetime welfare recipients were becoming “productive” by being placed in jobs and thus taxpayer money was saved.
One other key aspect of the pilot programs that became law under PRWORA is that many states began imposing a lifetime limit on all welfare recipients. No lifetime limit had existed before, but now welfare programs instituted restrictions ranging from 21 to 60 months (Grogger and Karoly 2005:24). Further, state governments have “sole discretion” in determining sanctions beyond the federal penalties (US Congress 1996:2141). Florida is nationally recognized for its stern approach to welfare recipients determined to be abusing the system:

Sanction policies vary across the states in the type of penalty imposed, and Florida’s policies are among the strictest, resulting in an immediate, full-family loss of TANF benefits as well as a reduction of food stamp benefits to the fullest extent permitted by federal law (Fording, et al. 2007:294).

Florida is not alone, however, as 13 other states instituted similar policies “that eliminate aid for the full family at the first instance of noncompliance with a program requirement” (Soss, et al. 2001:381). Federal sanctions are not only levied on individual welfare recipients but on states as well that do not mandate employment or move people expeditiously off welfare into jobs. Conversely, states receive cash bonuses from federal agencies when they demonstrate efficiencies in their welfare programs. Collectively, the pressure on government employees to demonstrate they are meeting or exceeding the necessary evaluation criteria can shape how people experience welfare policy. Two examples illustrate this point involving federal and state agencies.
Incentivizing Efficiency over Effectiveness

A View of the Federal Level

The USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) oversees the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the “Food Stamp Program” (FSP). Since the 1977 Food Stamp Act, FNS has given cash bonuses to states with the lowest payment error rates to food stamp recipients (Federal Registrar 2005:6314). Essentially, the cash bonuses incentivize states to determine who exactly is eligible and to pay them accordingly. FNS acknowledges, “State agencies and advocate groups expressed concerns that this incentive was too narrowly focused on payment accuracy and should be modified to also reward States for efficient management of the FSP in other areas” (Federal Registrar 2005:6314), such as accessibility, usability and even satisfaction of citizens’ program experience. It was not until 2002 that performance measures expanded to include some of these other criteria.

Today, the cash bonuses total $48 million to the top performing states, of which $30 million follows the 1977 act of reducing payment errors (Federal Registrar 2005:6323). There is $12 million allotted to states that enroll more of their eligible population in SNAP and $6 million is divided among states who process “expedited” applications within seven days and all other applications within 30 days (Federal Registrar 2005:6323).

It has taken 25 years for the FNS to incentivize the effectiveness of its food assistance program by encouraging greater access and timely processing of applications, but no similar incentive exists for citizen satisfaction with services.
Today, the entire food assistance program from the national, state to the local level is oriented towards improving “efficiency” – defined as determining who is eligible and whether they are being paid the correct amount. Efficiency is of course important, as is a commitment to democratic principles to guarantee everyone requiring public assistance can apply, including online, using the requisite technology.

A View of the State Level

The Florida government agency that oversees unemployment compensation was once known as the “Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation” (AWI) prior to the 2010 state governorship of Rick Scott who merged it into the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEA). Poverty studies scholars (Soss, et al. 2011) researched the practices of AWI employees before the merger into the DEA. These researchers learned how state leadership told AWI employees at the “street-level” (Lipsky 2010) (i.e., those who interacted with unemployment applicants) that their performance ratings were too low or demonstrating inefficiency. “In response, regional officials decided to overhaul key features of the local operation. Acting on the assumption that low performance numbers were a result of having too many clients who were ‘not serious enough,’ Region A officials chose a path of action designed to trim the caseload down to an easier-to-serve core of clients” (Soss, et al. 2011:210). Instead of helping everyone who approached the AWI office to secure unemployment benefits, they devised their own formula to “nudge” (Thaler and Sunstein 2008) certain people out by reformulating the requirements to receive
welfare benefits. These requirements included mandatory 40 hours of class one week before sending in their application and briefings with first-time applicants informing them of arduous prerequisites to receive unemployment aid, suggesting instead applying for food assistance as an easier alternative (Soss, et al. 2011:210-211).

Rather than encouraging participation of all in need, applicants were weeded out on criteria based on whether or not they were perceived as being able to boost performance measures. Evaluation can drive policy design and implementation counter to the efficacy of the program (Strathern 2000; Vintar and Nograšek 2010). This phenomenon might be understood as “creaming” (Bell and Orr 2002) where those viewed as most likely to succeed and boost performance measures are allowed by the street-level policy workers to apply for benefits (Soss, et al. 2011:219). Moreover these actions follow a history of “deeming” by welfare caseworkers with discretionary power to deem or withhold aid to their clients based on a number of subjective reasons, including whether clients were acting morally (Gordon 1994:298).

**Perverse Incentives as Disincentives to Apply**

The idea of “perverse incentives” has been popularized by economic theory as way of explaining unintended consequences that are opposite of the intended action (McCay and Jentoft 1998; Stiglitz 2008). For example, government program officials may seek greater efficiencies by automating services online, reducing staff and shutting offices, essentially relying more on e-government. Doing so, however, can actually increase the overall costs of the
program if the number of people who are applying for and receiving public services increases (Fountain 2005:11). Further, if evaluation is designed to encourage program effectiveness, particularly accessibility and usability, then the pressure on policy workers is to increase the participation rates in their programs. Conversely, if the program is less effective in its accessibility and usability or if evaluating the user experience is not a priority, then the fewer people who apply successfully the less these public programs cost.

Disincentives to apply for public programs are not unique among street-level government workers who enact policies that make applicants’ experiences unnecessarily difficult (Kingfisher 1998; Lipsky 2010; Susser and Kreniske 1987). These disincentives are known as “rationing by inconvenience;” conceived of as far back as 1945 to enable the USDA to limit food aid. The idea was to remove eligibility criteria or means tests to determine whether a household has sufficiently low income and wealth (i.e., the means to eat). In places of means tests, if someone really wanted to eat, then they would complete whatever USDA application criteria necessary. All others who would not want the hassle would give up:

Benefits to participants must outweigh such deterrents as the effort required to register and to maintain participant status, inconveniences associated with participation (such as buying stamps in advance or getting foods through special outlets), or any accompanying social stigma. In programs based on ‘rationing by inconvenience’ these deterrents are themselves depended upon to provide a sufficient restriction on participation, eliminating the need for means tests” (Southworth 1945:46).

It appears as though some state government programs enacted rationing by inconvenience while also including eligibility criteria. Disincentives to apply have since been well documented in welfare services (Cloward and Piven 1966;
Kingfisher 1998; Soss 1999; Susser 1982), including an e-government Medicaid program in New Mexico, researched by an anthropologist (Lopez 2005). In the case of the latter, the author found “technical disenfranchisement” to be common, that is, both the technology as well as the technicalities of how individuals experience the application process served as a barrier to receive benefits.

More recently in Florida in 2012 two workers’ rights organizations prompted the U.S. Department of Labor to investigate the state’s unemployment assistance application processes. “At issue are new rules that require applicants for unemployment benefits to complete a 45-question skills test and to file by computer instead of telephone […] More than 86,000 Floridians were denied unemployment benefits in the first three months of this year, a 67 percent increase over the same period in 2011. Only 17 percent of the state's unemployed received benefits in 2011, compared with the national average of 27 percent” (Pounds 2012). Whether disincentives are intentionally designed or are simply an outcome of evaluative practices that pressure policy workers to demonstrate program efficiency is unknown. What is known, however, is that applicants experienced these practices meaningfully.

“Audit Culture”

Anthropological research about lower-income U.S. populations has examined the way policy workers evaluate welfare programs (Morgen, et al. 2010; Riemer 2001). However, focusing on evaluation as an influential force of program design, implementation and welfare recipients’ experiences, is atypical within the welfare policy literature I reviewed. This focus can be aided by
anthropological analysis on education policy that developed a concept known as “audit culture” (Strathern 2000). This concept is used to analyze normative evaluation practices to discern not only their ideological aims, but also how they can shape the efficiency and effectiveness of government programs. Evaluation from this perspective does not become something auxiliary to understanding the program, rather it is at the core of perpetuating political-economic objectives.

For example, anthropologist Jessica Mulligan (2010:324) analyzed how Puerto Rican policymakers, health care providers and patients evaluate quality healthcare. She found “public policy conversations that revolved around quality inevitably take place in a language that is concerned with efficiency, standardization, and more often than not, economization.” Essentially, Mulligan discovered the evaluative practices surrounding quality care were not centered on understanding and improving clients’ experiences, but rather measuring efficiency as the baseline for improvement. These practices correlated with the management of a health care system centered on cost reduction rather than patients’ access and overall experiences.

“Science of the State”

The idea of “audit culture” is shaped by the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault (Shore 2008). Foucault developed the wide reaching concept of “governmentality” to which the political ideology of neoliberalism is attributed (Wacquant 2011). Governmentality means political “rationality” (Foucault 1982:210; Foucault, et al. 1991) or “logic” (Ong 2007:3). Foucault used it to explain why and how public leaders and government employees in 18th Century
Europe exercised their power through various techniques meant to achieve their political goals (Bröckling, et al. 2011). He and others argue that these techniques are still employed today, such as the manner in which government statistics, produced through evaluations or audits, are used. Drawing on Foucault, Rabinow reminds us that

> 'statistics' [...are] the science of the state. The art of government and empirical knowledge of the state's resources and condition - its statistics - together formed the major components of a new political rationality. A rationality, Foucault assures us, from which we have not yet emerged (Rabinow 1984:16).

Statistics allow knowledge and power to work together through a concept Foucault termed “technologies” (Foucault, et al. 1988; Rabinow 1984:17).

Foucault’s ideas help us to question the function, objectivity and meaning of statistics, measurement and evaluation within society, particularly of public policies. Such questioning produced analytical concepts such as “audit culture” (Strathern 2000) in anthropology, the “evaluative state” (Neave 1988, 1998) in education policy and the “audit society” (Power 1997) in accounting. Each concept, in its own way, reflects how evaluation has become naturalized and permeates public spaces not historically commoditized and evaluated.

Public education for anthropologists was among the first areas for analyzing audit culture (Strathern 2000). Anthropologists have used the concept to examine the practices of welfare agencies (Scherz 2011) and even bureaucracy more broadly (Bernstein and Mertz 2011). In the case of my own research, analyzing DCF’s audit culture means probing the manner in which it evaluates the ACCESS application process, the ideologies evident within its
evaluative practices, and how it presents the data from these evaluations to the public.

Audit culture contributes towards a model for an anthropology of e-government by recognizing that evaluative practices can advance political and ideological aims (Bannister 2007). This is because evaluations often follow the initial design of e-government programs. The pressure evaluations exert on policy workers to demonstrate efficiency, however, can eventually shape how future iterations of these programs are maintained, implemented and ultimately experienced by citizens (Shore 2008). This process can fine tune policy implementation; it can also lead evaluation to drive the way e-government programs are designed post facto as new iterations of public websites are refined towards their respective evaluative criteria (Vintar and Nograšek 2010). The tail can wag the dog. This is similar to federal educational standards that lead instructors into “teaching to the test” whereby evaluating student learning shapes how the curriculum is taught rather than the goal of effective and meaningful pedagogy (White House 2012b).

**E-Government**

E-government can be defined as the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as computers, the Internet and mobile phones “to integrate government information and services for citizen, business, government, and other institutional uses” (Seifert and McLoughlin 2007:1). The purpose of e-government is to create “1. more efficient government, 2. better services to citizens, and 3. improved democratic processes” (Gronlund and
Horan 2005:718). However, public officials often overshadow the last objective (Dawes 2008; Navarra and Cornford 2012). This is evidenced by the official U.S. definition established in the 2002 E-Government Act:

‘[E]lectronic Government’ means the use by the Government of web-based Internet applications and other information technologies, combined with processes that implement these technologies, to—(A) enhance the access to and delivery of Government information and services to the public, other agencies, and other Government entities; or (B) bring about improvements in Government operations that may include effectiveness, efficiency, service quality, or transformation” (US Congress 2002:2902).

This official U.S. definition of e-government emphasizes the citizen-government relationship by positioning technology as an efficient, service-delivery device. Technology can improve the way many members of the public experience government programs. Further, the term “transformation” in the above definition opens the possibility to improve the government’s capacity to strengthen civic participation, which can occur through partnerships with NGOs (Kettl 2002:170; US Congress 2002:2902). The official definition of e-government overall, however, coincides with the idea of governmentality and how it serves as a political technology to advance what I call taxpayer citizenship. Moreover, positioning e-government from this perspective overlaps with a neoliberal ideology of government that can prioritize efficient public programs ahead of effective ones (Soss, et al. 2011). The discussion of the ACCESS program below will demonstrate this further as the three primary documents I reviewed to understand DCF’s perspective primarily focus on ACCESS as utilitarian rather than its potential to democratize social service accessibility and usability.
In addition to e-government there is also “e-governance,” about which a breadth of definitions exists (Dawes 2008) shaped in part by the different disciplinary backgrounds of those who research it (Scholl 2009). For some researchers in information science, “e-Government refers to what is happening within government organizations […] e-Governance, on the other hand, refers to the whole system involved in managing a society” (Gronlund and Horan 2005:719). Public policy scholar Jane Fountain takes a different stand:

“[e-g]overnance encompasses the structures, processes, and behaviors that together provide steering and rowing functions in government. […] Electronic government, or e-government refers to the current potential to build government services and practices using existing technologies and applications” (Fountain 2002:6).

The difference between e-governance and e-government for some is a matter of scale, vision and complexity.

An alternative definition of e-governance and e-government is that the former contains an assemblage of political-economic-cultural ideologies that manifest through the design, creation and implementation of the latter (Chadwick and May 2003; Ciborra 2005; Navarra and Cornford 2012). I subscribe to this approach in my research in order to understand how DCF leadership’s ideological orientation shapes the design of the ACCESS program and the way it is experienced by applicants and employees at public libraries and NGOs.

A Brief History of U.S. E-Government

E-government originates from the application of information management systems applied to government processes. This has occurred in two ways (Relyea 2002). The first has been to organize, secure and share information
within and among government agencies. Examples include the various Privacy and Paper Reduction Acts during the 1970s and 1980s (Relyea 2002:12). The second has been to provide the public with greater access to government information, which arguably started in earnest since the 1966 Freedom of Information Acts and its subsequent revisions over the next three decades (Gronlund and Horan 2005:714; Relyea 2002:13).

The Clinton-Gore administration is credited with popularizing the term "electronic government" in the 1993 U.S. National Performance Review (GAO 2010; Gore 1993). It was during their administration that every federal agency included a new leadership position of Chief Information Officer (CIO) to coordinate the use of information technology. Adair et al. described (Brito 2007:32) how Congress passed legislation in 1996 in an attempt to reduce costs incurred by citizens who request information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The e-FOIA amendment required agencies to post information online along with FOIA request forms (Adair, et al. 2007:1). This legislation, however, did not mandate all government agencies in the executive branch to have a website, which avoided e-FOIA compliance for six years until the E-Government Act of 2002 required it (Bertot and Jaeger 2006).

The history of e-government also includes the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, co-sponsored by former Senator Barack Obama, and the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 (Brito 2007:2). The Transparency Act led to the creation of USASpending.gov that allows the public to search federal government contracts and awards by
state and congressional districts. The Honest Leadership Act mandated “information about earmarks be published on a public, searchable website [at least] 48 hours before a vote can be taken on the bill containing the earmarks” (Brito 2007:2). It also requires a similar online presence before voting “on the adoption of a report by a committee” (US Congress 2007:758). However, this amendment can be “waived” for several reasons, including “as a result of a significant disruption to Senate facilities or to the availability of the Internet” (US Congress 2007:758).

In 2001, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) created an “E-Government Task Force” that centralized former President George W. Bush’s “high priority, cross-agency e-government initiatives” that largely focused on homeland security (GAO 2005:1). While gains were made during his tenure involving e-government, Congress did not reauthorize the 2002 E-Government Act in 2007. The Act included amendments and the requisite funding to assess the privacy of public information as well as to make the information easier to find through online search engines (US Congress 2012a).

Five years after the reauthorization failed in 2012, President Barack Obama mandated all federal agencies to create a more “customer-centric” e-government experience. The report outlining his vision, Digital Government: Building a 21st Century Platform to Better Serve the American People, requires all government agencies to (1) design websites and information for mobile phones and tablets, (2) have their online information be easily searchable, and (3) make raw data placed on government websites open source, allowing
developers to use the data to create applications that the public can more readily use (White House 2012a). The challenge in implementing these changes, however, is they must occur within existing budgetary constraints.

**E-Government in Other Countries**

E-government is not just an American phenomenon, though the U.S. was among the first to use computer systems in government to coordinate information sharing among different agencies (Fountain 2005:2). Developing countries are also attracted to e-government because of the allure of efficiency. The disparity between the perception of public officials to achieve efficiencies and the reality on the ground of how the public use these services as well as the required infrastructure to support it have led to many failed e-government projects (Heeks 2003).

The World Summit on the Information Society, under the auspices of the United Nations, met in 2003 and 2005 to address the challenges with efficient e-government implementation meant to "eradicate poverty and achieve the U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015" (ITU 2008:Foreward). Each year since 2005, the U.N. convenes follow-up meeting to share ideas and innovations, including public-private partnerships, corporate innovations and government initiatives to improve civic participation electronically (ITU 2012).

In addition to this ongoing forum, the U.N. produces an annual e-government survey assessing how countries worldwide are using Internet, computer and mobile technologies. The title of its 2012 report was *E-Government for the People* (UN 2012). Two key findings in the report pertinent to the literature
review include first, the continuing challenge of governments to improve uptake or the usage of government websites by their respective publics. The report identifies low uptake results from incongruence between existing online government services and “citizen demand” (UN 2012:7).

The assumption here is that people have a choice in deciding how best to access and use public information and services between the physical world and the virtual. This of course is not the case with the ACCESS program as explained in the previous chapter, which transitioned from a paper-based, caseworker model to an e-government, self-directed system (Cody, et al. 2008). While the choice to apply for ACCESS benefits may exist, the application process nudges users forcefully online rather than towards the paper version.

The second important finding from the U.N. report is the proliferation of online evaluative practices to garner citizen feedback on public programs and to provide feedback in response to what citizens say.

More countries now provide online surveys or feedback forms – 87 compared to 55 in 2010 […] The 2012 Survey found that Twitter and Facebook are increasingly being deployed by governments as vehicles for consultation. The 24-7 reach of these tools provides a cost effective mechanism for citizen alerts as well as for views on how the government is doing. […] The number of countries encouraging government officials to respond to citizen input more than doubled, from 16 to 38 […] Governments are increasingly mindful of how ‘well’ they are doing (UN 2012:46-47).

The report stopped short of saying online evaluations drive the design of e-government programs, however, it made clear that these evaluations matter to policy workers. The U.N. survey also included an E-Government Development Index, ranking more than seven dozen countries of which The United States placed fifth behind Denmark, The United Kingdom, The Netherlands and The
Republic of Korea, which was first (UN 2012:11). Examination below of national
benchmarking practices and other evaluative techniques will reveal their
influence in the design of e-government programs.

E-Government in Florida

Let us narrow the scope from the international and national stage to the
local. In 2002, each county in Florida assumed ownership of the rights to
mycountry.com, making Florida the “first fully integrated local government e-
commerce website in the nation” (MyFloridaCounty.com 2008). Today, the official
website for the state of Florida, MyFlorida.com, lists dozens of online services
and sources of information for residents, visitors and businesses. Floridians can
go online to request an absentee ballot, report companies that violate Do Not
Call requests, pay child support, file for unemployment assistance, and apply for
Medicaid and SNAP benefits (MyFlorida.com 2012).

An important step in centralizing oversight of how the Florida government
uses technology was creating the Chief Information Officer (CIO) position in 2007
within the Agency for Enterprise Information Technology (AEIT) (Hanson 2007).
AEIT is also tasked with assessing and recommending how state government
agencies purchase and use information technology.

Historically each Florida government agency has developed and
supported not only agency-specific resources and applications,
but also more commodity-based resources such as email, file
storage/backup and networking. In the absence of an enterprise
approach, agencies developed individual data centers,
applications, staffing, and the infrastructure to support their
operational IT needs. This approach has produced duplication of
services and, ultimately, increased costs for the state of Florida.
Florida is by no means an isolated case, and many state
governments are attempting to implement an enterprise
approach to IT (AEIT 2012).
Nothing is out of the ordinary with either the mandate of AEIT agency or its ideological commitment to the “enterprise approach,” until the subsequent statement on the company’s website. It begins with how this approach has failed for over 30 years and yet AEIT should not abandon it because of its promise, however delayed, to produce efficiency.

In Florida, an enterprise approach to IT for state government has been attempted over the last three decades with little success. While there are many reasons for past failures, the need is more urgent than ever. Consistency, consolidation and a comprehensive approach all yield the same result—cost savings for Florida’s taxpayers, while still providing high quality IT services to the state’s government and its citizens (AEIT 2012).

Failure of this policy has arisen, in part, through a history of cost overruns (St. Petersburg Times Editorial 2004) and scandals (Willson 1993a, b) associated with IT purchases within Florida state agencies. There is an Orwellian justification to single-mindedly pursue efficiency, however, through the enterprise approach even though it appears to be a lost cause. This speaks to the power of a political-economic ideology in continuing a course of action in spite of sustained failure. It also complements the foregoing discussion of welfare policy among federal and Florida policy workers who incentivize program efficiency, at times, to the detriment of effectiveness.

E-Government, Librarianship & Public Libraries

Library and information science researchers in academia have well examined e-government and public policies as well as librarianship and historically marginalized populations (Bertot and Jaeger 2006, 2008; Gibson, et al. 2009; Jaeger 2005; Jaeger and Bertot 2011; Jaeger and Burnett 2010; Jaeger and Fleischmann 2007; McClure and Jaeger 2008; Venturella 1998). Much of
This work is cited throughout this dissertation; however, a portion is grouped here. This work complements the anthropological literature’s critique of neoliberalist or New Public Management (NPM) policies, and also demonstrates how public librarians are adapting to the devolution of federal and state services.

In terms of critiquing NPM, John Buschman described how this philosophy frames “library users as consumers—not citizens or readers or researchers” and that libraries are “subject to the social and fiscal discipline of the ‘need’ to turn every public resource to the service of information capitalism […] as sites of economic (instead of democratic) value” (Buschman 2003:76). The idea of “democratic value” in libraries means more than being a place to vote during elections. Public libraries have a history of advancing human rights, particularly for marginalized populations (McCook and Phenix 2006).

The American Library Association (ALA) serves as an umbrella institution for librarianship and library policy, and maintains in its Policy Manuel Section 61 entitled “Library Services to the Poor” (ALA 2012b). This policy complements the efforts of librarians who have reached out to lower-income communities by partnering with community organizations to inform them of library resources, such as school tutoring programs, in addition to referring them to state agencies that provide social services (McCook and Meyer 2001).

While the ALA policy is clear that public libraries should assist lower-income and homeless people, adherence to this guideline is not uniform. Some public libraries institute "odor policies and civility campaigns that [have] lead to the criminalization of poor people" (McCook and Phenix 2006:67). Buschman has
described tiers of customers within public libraries. That is, lower-income patrons or those who do not contribute to the tax base of the library can have their needs overshadowed by more wealthy patrons “who can ‘vote’ with money or tax support” (2003:122). There is still much to do in advocating for the rights of lower-income populations in public libraries.

In addition to the ALA’s effort to advance human rights, it also keenly aware of the role technology is having on its profession. An important federal program advancing the way libraries use technology and provide technological services to the public is through the Library Services and Technology Act of 1996:

[It] is the only federal program exclusively for libraries. It is administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). State libraries use the funds to support statewide initiatives and also distribute the funds through subgrants or cooperative agreements to public, school, academic, research, and special libraries [...] Around the country, knowledgeable librarians use LSTA funding to help patrons access essential information on a wide range of topics. (ALA 2012a).

The ALA also provides an “E-Government Toolkit” to help its members “in determining national public policy priorities and in designing local programs and services that reflect current E-Government practices” (ALA 2012a).

Some library researchers have identified four e-government services offered by public libraries (Bishop, et al. 2011). The first is “Basic Services,” which is responsive, in that librarians attempt to answer patrons’ questions as they use government websites. The second is “Library-Driven Services,” such as providing classes on e-government and serving as an information center during natural disasters. The third is "Agency-Driven Services" where government
agencies initiate a relationship with libraries to improve the way citizens use these agencies’ services. Initiatives may involve agencies conducting workshops or placing staff periodically in libraries to facilitate the public’s access to their services. The last type of e-government service is known as "Collaborative Services." In this scenario there is joint decision-making and an “active partnership” between a public library and a government agency.

Florida librarian Nancy Fredericks (2011) and her colleagues in Pasco County have implemented “Library-Driven Services” to cope with the unfunded mandates to assist patrons with e-government programs. For example, they created video tutorials to assist patrons with e-government websites and allow them to also schedule appointments with staff ahead of time for assistance. Furthermore, she and her data management team in the County library system have developed very detailed statistical gathering to demonstrate the breadth and depth of assistance they provide patrons with e-government, among other services. These data are helpful in pressing for greater funding for the County library system and evidence the extent to which librarians assist the public with digital government.

"Digital Difference"

“Digital difference” can be thought of as the disparity between groups of people to access and use information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Zickuhr and Smith 2012) and to participate in society socially, economically, politically and in other ways (Jenkins, et al. 2006; UN 2012). These differences vary according to the financial resources to afford ICTs and sufficient Internet
bandwidth (Hardy 2008; White House 2012c); the requisite physical and mental capacity to use the technologies (Jaeger 2006a, b), the degree of formal education and technological literacy (Yu 2006), and feeling whether or not going online is important to one’s life (Zickuhr and Smith 2012).

Anthropologist Faye Ginsburg cautions against terms such as the “digital divide” and the “digital age” that are similar to “neodevelopmentalist language that assumes that less privileged cultural enclaves with little or no access to digital resources—from the South Bronx to the global south—are simply waiting, endlessly, to catch up to those more privileged” (2006:130). She compares depictions of people during the stone and bronze ages as defined by their superiority or inferiority based on their technological capabilities with similar treatment of people in today’s “digital age.” Other anthropologists have demonstrated how historically marginalized communities are overcoming an ideological divide between how they see themselves and how others have traditionally viewed them (Fetterman 2005; Forte 2001; Ginsburg, et al. 2002; Nelson 1996). These communities are doing this by appropriating technology and the media to reframe public discourse in their own image or to advance their own political and socioeconomic struggles.

The Pew American and Internet Life Project measured national Internet accessibility and usability in 2011. They found about 80 percent of U.S. adults and 95 percent of teenagers use the Internet (Zickuhr and Smith 2012:4). “Ultimately, neither race nor gender are themselves part of the story of digital difference in its current form. Instead, age (being 65 or older), a lack of a high
school education, and having a low household income (less than $20,000 per year) are the strongest negative predictors for internet use” (Zickuhr and Smith 2012:6). Socioeconomic class and age continue to be influential factors in shaping one’s ability to participate in society online.

**E-Government Evaluation Research in Theory and Practice**

Whatever else ideologies may be - projections of unacknowledged fears, disguises for ulterior motives, phatic expressions of group solidarity - they are, most distinctively, maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience.” ~ Clifford Geertz (1973:220)

How would one describe the “collective conscience” of the e-government evaluation literature? Admittedly, disciplinary orientation and individual worldview shape such an answer. The archetype appears to be a politically neutral (Andersen, et al. 2010; GAO 2011), electronic survey-based instrument (Osman, et al. 2011; Wood, et al. 2008) that objectively (ForeSee 2012; Liu, et al. 2010; UN 2012) assesses different dimensions or factors of an online government program. Moreover, the results produced by these online surveys are generalized to the broader population of users when they in fact lack statistical external validity (Lange 2009:19). A view made less explicit in the e-government research is the one I endorse here. That is, e-government programs - and arguably the measures used to assess them - are not value neutral tools (Ciborra 2005; Fountain 2008; Sefyrin and Mörtberg 2009), devoid of political (Dawes and Pardo 2008:3; Jensen 2010; Lopez 2005; Wong and Welch 2004) or ideological aims (Bekkers and Homburg 2007; Chadwick and May 2003; Mulligan 2010; Navarra and Cornford 2012).
When e-government evaluations are framed as objective, this removes the ideological contexts that gave rise to the evaluations in the first place.\textsuperscript{6} Considering ideology during analysis influences how the results of evaluations will be interpreted and subsequently used or discarded by stakeholders. The stakeholders under consideration here are e-government program managers and their subordinates, the legislatures funding such programs, and ultimately the public using these programs. Evaluations reflect the values of their designers and their superiors. Evaluations are culturally and contextually contingent, deployed strategically for political economic purposes. The following three articles serve as examples.

“How Much Do We Trust Different E-Government Surveys?” (Vintar and Nograšek 2010) investigated how some policy officials mold the design of e-government programs to the detriment of program effectiveness in order to demonstrate stellar results on international evaluations or benchmarks. The researchers questioned the objectivity and veracity of such evaluations. Hun Myoung Park (2012) demonstrated how the Republic of Korea topped global e-government benchmarks and yet the country scored poorly in the population’s ability to access government websites. This was because the government designed the websites using foreign software that does not mesh well with a popular web browser favored by Koreans. The author demonstrates it is possible for a country to lead the world on e-government indexes of information technology when the citizenry cannot access its websites. This article speaks to

\textsuperscript{6} While this argument could be extended to evaluations in general, the nature of this research is focused on e-government.
the seemingly natural status of privileging efficiency over effectiveness in e-government evaluation (Stragier, et al. 2010). There is no inherent tension between program administrators’ balance of efficiency and effectiveness among other goals, but each can be exceedingly challenging to achieve and the former appears to be prioritized over the latter in this study as well as in my own research described in later chapters. The third article and example is by Victor Bekkers and Vincent Homburg (2007, p. 374) who examined the “assumptions and spotlight[ed] the chasm between the rhetoric and reality of e-government.” Their analyses identified various “myths” or assumed truths of e-government research, including how information and communication technologies (ICTs) sustain or enhance political power rather than diminish or democratize it.

These critiques of e-government evaluation may result from the methodological practices favoring positivist rather than ethnographic and critical approaches to research. Critiques of these normative practices are taken from two publications below that reviewed the e-government literature. The first publication concluded:

[a] great majority of our e-government researchers appeared to do little more than sit at their PCs. Per se, this does not invalidate research but large tranches of data, events, opinions, etc. are inaccessible to such researchers (Heeks and Bailur 2006:16).

Secondly, methodological choices such as using primary data, triangulation of findings, and concepts with an analysis approach to produce theory are found rarely in the e-government literature (Yildiz 2007:660).

One goal of my research is to contribute to these shortcomings by advancing a model for an anthropology of e-government.
Moreover, e-government scholar Hans Jochen Scholl (2011) maintains a publicly available bibliography of e-government literature in English. A keyword search of more than 4,200 entries produced fewer than 10 returns with “ethnography” or “ethnographic” combined. “Qualitative” yielded less than 100. The terms “citizen-centered,” “human-centered” and “user-centered” provided no more than 35 citations in total. “Ideology” and “ideologies” garnered less than 15 results. Admittedly a crude measure, Scholl’s bibliography speaks to the dearth in the literature of both qualitative and ethnographic methods as well as examination about ideologies. This is not to say that using qualitative and quantitative methods are not valued nor politicized. Rather, the constraints of time, finance and faculty expertise and promotion do not readily lend themselves to mixed methods research nor triangulation of the data for many e-government scholars (Gil-Garcia 2012:180). Disciplinary training and worldview also influence whether e-government researchers question the ideological implications of existing evaluative practices and the power of evaluation to shape the user experience.

The Design Literature

“Design” means more than style, fashion and aesthetics. It involves the systematic understanding and unavoidable shaping of the human condition through things, services and physical spaces. Two parallel, historical tracks comparing largely U.S. design and anthropological practices are offered here merging into a cross-disciplinary field known as “Design Anthropology” (Clarke 2011a; Millman 2011:59; Tunstall 2008; Wasson 2000). Each disciplinary track
experienced pivots among a group of its practitioners in directions outside of the “mainstream” at the time. Today, anthropological methods have pollinated design, but reverse pollination from design appears slower in its uptake among the broader applied anthropological community. The aim here is to provide specific practices anthropologists can apply from design to understand the user experience, particularly of e-government services. There very well may be theoretical contributions from design to anthropology (Cross 1982, 2001; Lois Frankel 2010), but the scope of the literature reviewed here is methodological.

Overlapping Historical Tracks of Anthropology and Design

Defining “an anthropology of design” or “design anthropology” is problematic when there is divergence among practitioners and academics alike of what exactly it is, how it should be done, and who is doing it “correctly” or even at all (Clarke 2011b; Tunstall 2008). The work of anthropologists Alfred Gell (1998:15) and Daniel Miller (Miller 2005, 2010) is instructive. To paraphrase Miller, an alternative way of understanding what is design as it relates to anthropology is to ask, “What does design do?” (2008:1122). That is, imbuing agency within design or conceiving of it as a force acting upon the human condition. Starting from this approach, let us understand the overlapping history of anthropology and design.

Anthropologists in Chicago in 1946 founded the consulting firm Social Research, Inc (SRI) (Gardner 1977:172). Their work would advance the idea of a corporate “brand image” by emphasizing design around a symbolic approach to consumer research, specifically how “ideas, feelings, and attitudes concern not
only how well the product performs its technical function, but also what kind of person it is suitable for and what it says about them" (Karesh 1995:96). More than 30 years after being one of the three original founders of SRI, Burleigh Gardner wrote *The Anthropologist in Business and Industry*, advising anthropologists that "Wherever you find an opportunity in the business world, your success will depend on your ability to understand human behavior in social systems and not your skill in methodology of anthropological research" (Gardner 1977:173). Other anthropologists as well as designers described below would conclude differently by asserting ethnographic methods add value to businesses.

In the early 1970s, Finnish designer Victor Papanek (2009:xv) originally published *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*. The purpose of his manifesto was to cause the design establishment to reflect on the cultural, environmental and economic implications of their work. Papanek argued for a sustainable approach to design based on people’s observed behavior and needs (i.e., human-centered design and ethnographic research). He was particularly adamant about designing things that mattered to historically marginalized populations, particularly women, the elderly and the physically impaired. Further, he stressed how designers living outside of developing countries should move there in attempts to understand the lived experiences of these lower-income populations to design accordingly. Moreover, this ethnographic approach to design, he argued, would open opportunities for collaboration between designers from different cultures. Papanek’s
understanding of human-centered design was highly empathetic. His ideas shaped future generations of designers (Mau 2010; Norman 2010; Pilloton 2009).

Human-centered and empathetic research is standard practice among many anthropologists and designers today, but gradations of practice exist. This includes participatory action research that purposefully attempts to transition from *subjects* of research into research *participants*. This means research strategies designed not only about a group of people, but also for them and with them. In the same year Gardner helped to establish SRI, U.S. social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946:35) called for an alternative to the status quo of “research that produces nothing but books” lamenting that this practice alone “will not suffice.”

Anthropologist Sol Tax and his graduate students were early adopters of “action anthropology” in the 1950s by using the research process as an attempt to advance the socioeconomic aims of indigenous Americans (Tax 1958, 1975). The ascendency of action research on the global stage was marked in 1977 in Cartagena, Colombia where the first World Symposium of Action Research occurred (Fals Borda 2007:31). Australian-based education scholars Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (1988) would first produce *The Action Research Planner* in the early-1980s by offering specific techniques and strategies to conduct participatory, iterative, reflective research in educational settings. Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire also popularized reflective-thinking in education that spread to other fields, including anthropology (Freire 2000; Freire and Freire 1994).

Action research describes the methodological turn among some
anthropologists in paying closer attention to how research participants engage in shaping the model, process and outcome of research (Patterson 2001). For designers, focusing on users (Diffrient, et al. 1975) developed into “user-centered” design (Norman and Draper 1986). "There is a big difference between the expertise required to be a designer and that required to be a user. In their work, designers often become expert with the device they are designing. Users are often expert at the task they are trying to perform with the device" (Norman 1990:156). Since the 1980s, if not earlier, researchers in Scandinavia have also been contributing meaningfully to more democratic design practices (Bjerknes, et al. 1987; Bødker, et al. 2000; Ylirisku and Buur 2007).

Returning to anthropology in the late-1970s and early-1980s, some practitioners began to focus on the design of computer technologies, advanced through the work of Lucy Suchman and her colleagues at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC). They used ethnographic methods and anthropological theory to design the office of the future in addition to exploring artificial intelligence (Suchman 2011). They concluded that by “designing technology we are designing social relations” (Anderson 1996:18). This followed in the tradition of anthropological analysis of corporate brands and material culture (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Sahlins 1972). But what Suchman and other anthropologists were doing was applying ethnographic methods to advance business value.

Anthropologists have continued to secure employment in consulting, research, and at design firms focused on how people experience goods, services
and physical spaces (Kelley and Littman 2005; Wasson 2000). As pioneering design anthropologist Elizabeth Tunstall concluded, after some of these anthropologists applied their craft outside of academia they started returning to the university (Millman 2011:59), though not necessarily in anthropology departments. The University of Aberdeen in the United Kingdom is recognized as being the first to offer a graduate degree in “Design Anthropology” (Leach 2011). No similar program exists in an anthropology department in the United States to the best of my knowledge, though some departments do offer courses or concentrations in the subject area.

Comparatively, there are anthropologists and designers instructing ethnographic methods at design schools across the United States and at one in New Zealand (Galloway 2004). Further, the Swinburne University of Technology’s Faculty of Design in Australia offers a graduate degree in Design Anthropology (Tunstall 2010). The desire to learn ethnographic methods and think anthropologically among practitioners of design is evidenced through the conference proceedings of the Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference (EPIC). The American Anthropological Association and a host of companies sponsor the annual conference and while anthropologists are present, my experiences at the 2010 conference found comparatively fewer working in academia. What can anthropologists within academia learn from these designers and anthropologists in industry to improve anthropological data gathering and analysis, particularly as it relates to e-government evaluative practices? The following design techniques may help to answer this question.
Design Techniques

There is a sub-field of design known as “service design” that commonly employs ethnographic methods to understand how users or potential customers interact with objects, spaces and people as they experience a service, such as medical treatment in a hospital or staying at a hotel (Brown 2009). These interactions are known as “touch points” or places where the user experiences different dimensions of a service (Kimbell 2011a:43). Anthropologists working with designers often “seek out the touch points of a situation [that offer] – the key opportunities that have been overlooked or misunderstood” (Kelley and Littman 2005:23). Analyzing the e-government application process by honing on touch points is one application of this approach.

Another principle of design is called the “nudge” (Lidwell, et al. 2010:170). Nudging means purposeful design to guide behavior often in predictable ways (Ariely 2008). In terms of designing information, one nudging technique involves how options and information are presented to people (Thaler and Sunstein 2008). For example, websites are typically designed with the most pertinent information to be found at the top, including the name of the website, a search function and critical links one needs to navigate through it. Another way design is used is to obscure data, as DCF appears to do, in the way it presents findings to the public from its optional ACCESS user feedback form (See Chapter 7). Designers of websites often nudge applicants towards the information they are most likely to find. Nudging is so effective in achieving political objectives that its adoption is proliferating across government agencies in the United States and
several European countries as way to implement policy at the street-level (The Economist 2012). One popular example includes increasing organ donation by having the default option on paperwork presented to individuals already marked as “yes,” allowing people to choose “no” if they wish (Johnson and Goldstein 2003). Another example is painting horizontal lines across roads ahead of dangerous curves, and narrowing the space between these lines just before the curves. This gives drivers the impression they are going too fast so they slow down, nudging them towards safer driving (Thaler and Sunstein 2008:39).

The final concept mentioned here that designers use is called a “workaround.” Workarounds occur when an individual is trying to accomplish a task within the perimeters of the designed service, object or environment (Suri and IDEO 2005). However, when someone devises an alternative technique for task completion outside of these perimeters, then it is a workaround. This often occurs because a more efficient way was discovered or an obstacle arose and was subsequently worked around. For example, early in my research an NGO employee found that when her clients call DCF they often have to negotiate a lengthy phone tree before being told to hang up because the lines were full or they were simply disconnected. She learned that by pushing zero four times or selecting the option to speak in Spanish even though she did not know the language enabled clients to wait in the queue to speak with a DCF employee who in fact knows English. Workarounds can provide a crude benchmark for understanding the gap between how a service is designed and how people are interacting with that service.
Touch points, nudges and workarounds are conducive to existing anthropological practices as each design technique involves participant-observation. Further, the assumption in using these concepts is to improve the user experience, a goal that complements action researchers. These three design concepts can also unearth where e-government websites obfuscate information and complicate procedures.

Conclusion

Analysis of the U.S. poverty studies literature in anthropology centered on the agency–structure axis and how it has shaped two competing narratives. Agency is often associated with personal responsibility and self-sufficiency that explain the obtainment of the American Dream and poverty. This view corresponds with assumptions about the market system working as it should, for the most part, where everyone has equal opportunity to accumulate capital through hard work. The understanding of government’s role in society from this perspective prioritizes being an efficient steward of taxpayer money. Evaluation of public policies, particularly of welfare programs, indicates that the privileging or incentivizing of efficiency can occur to the detriment of program effectiveness. Further, evaluative practices appear to be objective and value neutral.

Opposite agency are cultural, political, and economic structures, including ideologies, shaping the success of individuals to accumulate capital in a market based system where structures are at least as equally important as hard work in determining financial success or poverty. These constraints produce “structural vulnerabilities” (Holmes 2007, 2011) that lower-income populations experience
materially. Additionally the normative evaluative practices or “audit culture” of public programs are politically and ideologically motivated (Strathern 2000). Collectively, the ideas that critique these structures are aligned with a belief that government agencies should balance program efficiency with their effectiveness to have the public access and use them.7

The e-government literature included critiques of the political and ideological aims in using technology for government purposes. I found that these analyses, however, are infrequently made explicit in the discussions of evaluative practices of e-government programs. This is evident, I argue, by separating e-governance (i.e., the ideological and political aims) from e-government (i.e., the technological manifestations of these aims). While I keep the essence of both terms together in my use of “e-government,” other researchers use e-governance to achieve the same ends as I do. Besides theoretical orientations, the e-government literature revealed a penchant for statistical research that did not often include triangulating data findings through qualitative methods (Heeks and Bailur 2006; Yildiz 2007). The aim of my research is shaped in part by this gap, explaining the use of multiple methods to compare data findings. Participant-observation in particular lends insights that much of the other research on e-government lacks.

7 It is an understandable for government employees to struggle in their balance of program efficiency and effectiveness as they face, what public administration scholar Donald Kettl (2002:51) described as, “recurring tradeoffs: responsiveness and efficiency; centralization and decentralization; strong executives and separation of powers; federal control and federalism.” Moreover, while the critiques levied upon certain DCF managers and policy workers in other government agencies are based on research, it by no means implicates all public employees within these respective agencies or elsewhere.
The design literature also dealt with methods by highlighting what academic anthropologists can adapt from their colleagues in industry who pollinated ethnographic techniques among their design colleagues. Reverse pollination, however, has been slow in coming. I will apply touch points, nudges and workarounds in my analyses of the data results in addition to the other concepts discussed here that collectively form key components of a model for an anthropology of e-government proposed in the penultimate chapter.
CHAPTER 3: WHAT DCF KNOWS OR ARTICULATES ABOUT APPLICANTS’ EXPERIENCES

Overview

This chapter provides the necessary context about the creation of the ACCESS program; the stages of the application process, and the ways applicants' experiences differ from the previous paper-based procedure. A description of my field sites occurs in the following Methods Chapter. Here I answer a part of the first overarching research question, namely, "(Q1) What do DCF officials (a) know or articulate about the experiences of applicants and those who assist them at public libraries and NGOs?" Because DCF officials declined to participate in my research, three primary documents either written by DCF management or involving their input or shared with them directly are used to answer this part of the first research question. These documents demonstrate DCF management’s awareness of the experiences of applicants as well as employees of libraries and NGOs. Institutions that signed a formal agreement with DCF to assist the public with ACCESS are referred throughout this research as a “DCF Community Partner.” I will compare the conclusions in these reports later with my own findings in both of the results chapters. The findings from these reports not only outline the history of the program but also help to advance an anthropology of e-government.
The Three Primary Documents

The first document appeared in the magazine *Policy and Practice*, which is a publication of the American Public Human Services Association (Lange 2009). The author of the document, Jennifer Lange, was also the Director of the ACCESS program for the duration of my formal and informal gathering from 2007 to 2011. Her article, *The ACCESS Florida Experience*, provided a history of the program, a contemporary overview of its operations and its accomplishments, including exceptionally positive feedback from ACCESS users about their experiences.

The second document comes from the Florida Legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA). This office assesses state programs for the legislature. OPPAGA evaluated ACCESS in 2008. It described the process DCF management took to automate the system as well as the effects of the program on applicants (OPPAGA 2008). The report involved an unspecified number of discussions with DCF staff, and offered a bird’s eye view of program usage by clients. The last page of the report contained a letter from DCF management responding to OPPAGA’s findings.

The third document is a report funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Nutrition Service (FNS). FNS oversees the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) nationwide. FNS hired a private research firm, Mathematica Policy Research, to describe how DCF employees, Community Partners and applicants experienced the transition from a paper to
an electronic-based application process. The report is titled *Modernization of the Food Stamp Program in Florida* (Cody, et al. 2008). The report contained interviews with 36 separate Community Partners in 11 different cities, including NGOs and libraries. Three Community Partners located either in Anora County or a neighboring county were interviewed over the phone. Mathematica researchers conducted 12 focus groups with 111 applicants in three cities: Gainesville, Fort Meyers/Lehigh Acres and Miami (Cody, et al. 2008:B-4). None of these cities were included in my study, and libraries were not emphasized as a place of research in these reports. The authors of these reports do not include any data about observing Community Partners and applicants interacting with one another or individually at any stage of the application process in any of these reports, nor were think alouds and free lists used to gather data.

**The Creation of the ACCESS Program**

ACCESS came into being in 2003 after the Florida legislature required DCF to reduce its administrative budget, including its 7,208 employees in the ACCESS program (OPPAGA 2008:1). DCF leadership cut its workforce by 43 percent by 2006 down to 3,100 employees (Lange 2009:18). Since then the number of employees has risen to nearly 4,700 (DCF 2011b:13). The emphasis on government efficiency to serve more people with fewer staff through technology is emblematic of e-government. Consider that the number of Floridians receiving SNAP benefits rose from about 487,500 in February 2003 to 1.67 million in February 2011 (DCF 2012d): an increase of more than 240
percent. Efficiency as we shall see in later chapters does not necessarily confer program effectiveness or usability and accessibility.

Former ACCESS Director Jennifer Lange (2009:18) discussed how in 2003 DCF management adapted to the legislative mandate through “creativity,” that is, by asking local DCF offices in one Florida county “to come up with their own, new way of doing business.” DCF employees in this county started by looking into state statutes that were more stringent than federal laws for administering SNAP, Medicaid and temporary cash assistance. They found the federal Medicaid program did not require face-to-face interviews. This led to closer scrutiny of the federal SNAP policy that allowed a waiver of in-person interviews for applicants seeking emergency assistance. DCF successfully petitioned the federal government to do away with mandatory in-person interviews and attempted to simplify application procedures (OPPAGA 2008:2). By removing the face-to-face interviews and encouraging, “Little things like moving photocopy machines and adding drop boxes to lobbies so customers could make their own copies [and submit their applications independently] were early steps in transforming the system. The concept of self-service grew” (Lange 2009:18).

DCF scrutinized the necessity of paper documents and only those found absolutely necessary to validate claims of eligibility were required from applicants. DCF also allowed applicants in the same county piloting these creative innovations to mail in their paper documents, leave them in DCF drop boxes, or complete an electronic application on the DCF intranet (i.e., a network
using Internet technology with access limited to those within an organization).

Lange notes (2009:18) that ACCESS users responded favorably to the changes because it “was a vast improvement over the old process that often included up to three office visits, each involving hours of wait time.” Six months later these procedures spread statewide.

Further, Lange (2009:19) recounted how four hurricanes hit Florida in 2004, leading to a deluge of paper applications exceeding the means of processing them. DCF responded to the surge in demand by creating in 72 hours an internal electronic application that their staff used to enter manually into the new system from each paper application. The internal electronic application became the foundation for ACCESS, which DCF placed online in April 2005, officially launching the new Internet-based application process. In 2006, applicants completed 70 percent of SNAP, Medicaid and temporary cash assistance online, and since then the total number of all ACCESS applications completed online has remained above 90 percent (Lange 2009:18; Winstead 2010:3).

Applying on Paper vs. Online

DCF transitioned from a “caseworker model” during the paper-based application process to a electronic “self-service model” in ACCESS (Cody, et al. 2008:1). Under the older system, “clients had to visit a department office to fill out paper applications and then return to the office to complete in-person interviews and [then return again to] submit required documentation to prove eligibility” (OPPAGA 2008:2). They also would have to return to a DCF office to renew benefits as necessary. Moreover, interviews would often last an hour in addition
to the time waiting to speak to a caseworker and traveling to and from the DCF office. Under the new system, interviews are done on the phone and typically last no more than 15 minutes (Cody, et al. 2008:xxi).

Under the old system, caseworkers had the opportunity after the interview to recommend other public services for which the client should consider applying. Today on the left side margin of the ACCESS homepage there are hyperlinks to other social services, but to the best of my knowledge, no other policy is in place to inform applicants of other social services. Also under the former system, applicants were susceptible to the discretion of the caseworker (Kingfisher 1998; Lipsky 2010; Susser 1982) with the power to "search for hidden resources within the family or household and to cancel or reduce stipends" (Gordon 1994:296). Today, there is no caseworker with similar discretionary power to withhold or dispense aid based on how they feel about the client.

**Stages of the ACCESS Application Process**

The following description about the ACCESS application process comes from my participant-observations and interviews, not the three primary reports. To begin with, some applicants still apply using the paper application. They can download it from the ACCESS website, request one from either a Community Partner or at the few remaining DCF offices or through the toll free DCF number. These applicants would then fax it to DCF.

People who complete ACCESS online receive a letter in the mail from DCF with instructions that may include information about a telephone interview. Applicants may also receive an email from DCF with these instructions. The
majority of applicants I assisted did not have email accounts or did not use them adeptly. The NGO employees I interviewed also commented on how few of their clients use email. According to an employee at one of the NGOs I researched, as of 2012, DCF has started giving applicants the option of receiving text messages to inform them of the next steps in the application process. Based on my participant-observations and interviews with NGO employees, applicants sometimes are given the flexibility to choose a phone interview time more convenient for them, other times they can wait a couple of hours to be called by DCF, and still on other occasions DCF will call the applicant on their mobile phone within minutes after submitting their application online.

The next step after being contacted by DCF is to photocopy and fax any requested paperwork, such as utility bills, pay stubs and a driver’s license. If an applicant is found to be eligible, they then receive an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which looks like a credit card, in the mail. They then need to activate it by calling a toll free telephone number in order to use their SNAP benefits. They also need to create a “My ACCESS” account in order to renew their benefits online or to check their status in the application process.

**What Do DCF Officials Know about the Experiences of Applicants?**

Former ACCESS Director Lange (2009:19) reported that 97 percent of clients responding to a DCF survey would agree to use ACCESS again and that 96 percent of users reported it is “easy or fairly easy to use.” She did not specify what percentage of applicants completed the survey nor was I able to obtain this information. She also found that keeping staffing levels so low “is severely taxing
the ability to answer phones and provide benefits quickly, and prompted the agency to seek additional positions” (2009:19). The OPPAGA (2008:4) findings corroborated Lange’s assertion that the automated phone system is swamped with calls as people routinely have questions to which Community Partners do not know the answers. The OPPAGA (2008:9) report noted that applying can be “especially problematic for elderly, disabled, illiterate, homeless, or mentally ill clients if they do not know how to use computers and do not have family or advocates to help them.” Finally, OPPAGA researchers found that pregnant mothers in immediate need of Medicaid are not informed upfront in the ACCESS application or on the homepage that an emergency option is available to them.\(^8\)

The Mathematica report, citing DCF survey data, found 91 percent of users described ACCESS as fair or easy to use and 93 percent said they would use the application again (Cody, et al. 2008:102). Mathematica researchers were inconclusive about whether or not ACCESS limited people’s ability to receive SNAP benefits. They found no change in participation rates in the composition of applicants across age, race and ethnicity and disability status between the paper ad online application processes. However, while the rest of the southeast United States was experiencing a growth in the rate of individuals receiving SNAP benefits between 2004 (before ACCESS went on the Internet) to 2006 (ACCESS going online), there was a decline in the number of Floridians receiving similar benefits (Cody, et al. 2008:xxx-xxxi). During that same amount of time the

\(^8\) I checked the ACCESS homepage in May 2012 and found the emergency Medicaid option for pregnant mothers has since been included early in the application process.
number of applications for SNAP rose. Moreover, between 2004 and 2006 Florida counties that experienced DCF office closures had lower rates of people receiving SNAP benefits than counties that did not experience similar closures. The Mathematica researchers said that ACCESS might have been a barrier to applicants but could not assert this definitively. A point not stressed in the report.

From the focus groups with applicants, including those with applicants who apply in public places, Mathematica researchers learned that most clients felt positively about their experience, finding it quick and relatively easy to use without need to go to a DCF office frequently or at all (Cody, et al. 2008:xxxi). The dominant critiques offered by these applicants about their ACCESS experience was the absence of “personal contact” with an informed DCF employee who could help them (Cody, et al. 2008:xxxii).

**What Do DCF Officials Know about the Experiences of Those Who Assist Applicants at Public Libraries and NGOs?**

Public libraries and NGOs were not singled out in the findings of the reports so it is uncertain how DCF officials differentiate between the experiences of either group of employees. Former ACCESS Director Lange (2009:19) did not delve into the experiences of Community Partners, only stating briefly that about 100 of the 3,000 plus partnering organizations are paid. The OPPAGA (2008:9) researchers found Partners “do not want to return to the old application process […] but they] have limited resources to offer assistance with completing applications and answering questions.” As a result, some Partners choose to serve only existing clients.

The Mathematica researchers found the most willing Partners were those
whose mission corresponded closely with the ACCESS program, such as providing food assistance. Other Partners gained financially, particularly hospitals that take Medicaid patients. Organizations hesitant about joining the partnership network were "concerned that becoming a partner would place an additional burden on their staff, diverting them from their regular duties, or that space limitations would preclude an influx of additional clients. "Some organizations objected because their staff thought DCF was asking external organizations to do its job” (Cody, et al. 2008:xxvi).

The Mathematica report was the only one of the three documents that introduced the idea of employees at local organizations not wanting to do the work of DCF without compensation. When DCF offices closed, then the public turned to libraries and NGOs for assistance with ACCESS even if these institutions were not being paid to provide this service. It is, in effect, an unfunded mandate by the Florida legislature and DCF to require the assistance of local actors to implement public policy without providing any funding.

**Conclusion**

This aim of this chapter has been to provide the requisite background knowledge about the creation of the ACCESS program; the stages of the application process, and the ways applicants’ experiences differ from the previous paper-based method. The chapter also answered a part of the first overarching research question, namely, “(Q1) What do DCF officials (a) know or articulate about the experiences of applicants and those who assist them at public libraries and NGOs?”
DCF management developed ACCESS “to simplify the client application process [i.e., usability], reduce administrative costs [i.e., efficiency] and increase client access to services [i.e., accessibility]” (Cody, et al. 2008:xix). DCF leadership relied on creativity and piecemeal steps, piloting a program in response to a legislative mandate to reduce staff and then later to cope with natural disasters. Technology enabled ACCESS to be scaled up across the state. During the early years of the program, DCF officials examined whether it would be more efficient to outsource the creation and maintenance of an automated system to a private company or develop it internally (Lange 2009:18). They concluded technical expertise should remain in-house.

DCF officials were aware that ACCESS is a work in progress with historically marginalized applicants being particularly challenged during the application process. No specifics were mentioned as to how these populations should be served aside from Community Partners, friends and family. In spite of the challenges, most applicants responded positively in surveys and focus groups about their ACCESS experience.

Community Partners also seemed to either endorse the program or prefer it to the older system. Since about 97 percent of Partners (Lange 2009) were reportedly not paid for their services, DCF management appeared to interpret this as a willingness of Partners to participate and endorsement for the Partner network. This is not say there were no critics, only that the sentiment shared among them neither dissuaded more than 90 percent of all applicants from applying online nor deterred thousands of organizations from joining the
Community Partner network without remuneration.

When discussing the positive attributes of e-government and ACCESS, all authors of the three reports overwhelmingly did so from a functional perspective (i.e., efficiency, accessibility and usability). These positive attributes never included improving civic participation and democratic values, such as enabling greater transparency into government affairs, providing the broader public with information to potentially valuable government resources, and allowing citizens to offer feedback as to how to make public programs more effective. The discourse in the reports framed ACCESS, instead as an objective tool capable of saving time and money. Assuredly, online services benefit many in the general public, including ACCESS users by reducing the time waiting in lines at DCF and conducting interviews over the telephone, among other reasons. The point, however, is that e-government offers more than a service in exchange for paying taxes. It has the capacity to advance democratic principles. The language of efficiency was found in the broader e-government literature as well as through the language of “taxpayer” citizenship. Further, DCF officials do not present ACCESS as representative of the government’s social responsibility to the citizenry. The online application process advances an ideology of self-sufficiency, which is after all in the acronym of the ACCESS program (i.e., Automated Community Connection to Economic Self-Sufficiency). Moving forward, the findings from the three reports provide a better understanding of ACCESS and its aims that ultimately inform a model for an anthropology of e-government.
CHAPTER 4: METHODS

Overview

The data gathering methods were designed to answer the two overarching research questions. (Q1) What do DCF officials (a) know or articulate about the experiences of ACCESS applicants at public libraries and NGOs, as well as the employees there who assist them; how do the officials (b) assess these experiences and (c) address the applicants’ and employees’ challenges with ACCESS? (Q2) How do ACCESS applicants and those who assist them at public libraries and NGOs (a) articulate and (b) assess their own experiences, and (c) address their challenges with the application process? The ethnographic approach I followed to answer these questions can be described as “narrowing the funnel,” which begins with informal data-gathering techniques that progress towards a more formal approach (Agar 1996:183-184). Below, I summarize the research approach and describe my two primary field sites. I then elaborate on each method and its relevance to the first two overarching research questions.

As mentioned in the Literature Review, ethnographic methods are not widely practiced in the e-government literature. As a result, the findings from these methods are meant to provide insight into the e-government user-experience in naturalistic settings that are not widely documented elsewhere.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I began my research informally in 2007 as a volunteer assisting youth and continued into 2008 and 2009 as volunteer helping
ACCESS applicants. In 2009, I approached management in the County library system and we chatted briefly about some of the overlapping challenges librarians share with HELP staff when assisting ACCESS applicants. During that time, I also conducted archival research to understand DCF’s perspective about its program and the public's experiences with it. A more expansive review of the literature followed and a research proposal emerged in 2009 with a clearer understanding of the research questions requiring more formal data gathering. This began when I returned to HELP to observe purposefully how applicants and staff members interacted with ACCESS and one another. I conducted semi-structured interviews with a key informant at HELP. I also asked this individual, other staff members and applicants there to “free list” or itemize all the challenges individuals face with the ACCESS application process. I accompanied some of these same applicants at HELP, asking them to “think aloud” as they worked through the application, expressing their thoughts about the experience and the application itself.

I went on to conduct semi-structured interviews and free lists with employees at other NGOs and at libraries. I intended to conduct interviews with applicants at HELP and other NGOs, but only had brief interviews with a handful of applicants at one library. This was unexpected. The applicants explicitly communicated to me they had little or no time to chat and that they did not find the application process challenging. None of them were completing the application for the first time so this sense of familiarity may have played a part.
I analyzed the data gathered up to this point in 2010, narrowing the funnel of formal methods by creating and implementing an online survey. I visited 17 NGOs in the County requesting their assistance to complete the survey. These visits also allowed me to document the range of office space, technology and assistance available to applicants. I pretested the survey with applicants, librarians and NGO employees before administering it. The last of 99 respondents completed the survey in early-2011.

**Primary NGO Field Site: HELP**

I started volunteering at HELP during the spring of 2007 as a part of a service-learning graduate course about urban poverty. HELP is ethnically diverse in terms of African American, Anglo Americans and Hispanic American employees totaling about a dozen people. I found HELP online by searching for urban-based community organizations with a mission to narrow the “digital participation gap” (Jenkins, et al. 2006) of engaging in society through Internet, computer and mobile technology.

HELP is located in a strip mall with a faded white exterior. It sits beside a cosmetologist with expertise in weaves and kinky hair that is next to an insurance company. Adjacent to this plaza is a heavily trafficked road. Massive potholes puncture the surrounding side streets; men who appear homeless can be regularly seen standing out front of a convenience store on the adjacent block.

HELP sits in a historically African American part of the city. Churches of many denominations fill the surrounding community, along with tasty soul food restaurants offering fried fish and okra. There is a laundromat, dry cleaner and a
house turned into a private business with porcelain commodes and kitchen sinks strewn across the front yard in case passersby are in the market for one or the other.

U.S. Census tract data at the level of city blocks from the 2005 and 2009 American Community Survey tells a similar picture as walking through this neighborhood: 78 percent of the residents are African American, 18 percent Hispanic and the remainder are Anglo or Asian American with a median household income slightly over $25,000 among about 1,100 households (Bloch, et al. 2011).

Security bars protect HELP’s windows and a gated entryway leads up to a wooden front door with an ACCESS logo printed on photocopy paper taped to the top and bottom. A more official looking sign announcing HELP as an ACCESS location is pushed into the dirt near the street.

Figure 4.1: ACCESS Signage

Inside HELP on any given day the computers are arranged in two rows flush against the walls with a small table in the middle allowing patrons to arrange their paperwork. Each row of computers has five or six functioning desktop terminals. ACCESS applicants are encouraged to use one row of computers and leave the
other row for all other services, such as résumés, unemployment benefits and online job applications.

Flat computer screens and sleek keyboards sit atop glass desks. Companies upgrading their computers donate them to HELP. Such donations enable HELP to give hundreds of computers away when the school year starts and around holidays. Black faux leather chairs on wheels with commanding armrests are stationed in front of each desk. My volunteer work, participant-observations and think alouds with ACCESS applicants all occurred in this room using chairs wedged in the corner. The chatter of everyone around tended to provide a veil of privacy by obscuring the interactions between the informants and me.

HELP employed me in the summer of 2007 to teach urban middle school students, all African American, how to use Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint. I also assisted HELP management write a grant during that time. I never worked for them again, but did continue as a volunteer in various ways even while formally gathering data. HELP served as the primary location for me to understand the ACCESS application process at NGOs, even though I visited more than a dozen other Community Partners in the County.

I chose those Partners from a photocopied list DCF provided to the public at its now-closed downtown office. The list only showed Partners open to the public, since others are open only to existing clientele. As will be detailed in the subsequent chapter, I visited several Partners on the list who appeared permanently closed, or the employees working there had no knowledge of
ACCESS or that DCF identified them as a Community Partner. I elaborate below on these experiences.

The list I used contained the name, telephone number and address of 28 Partners in Anora County. Employees from four of those Partners participated in the interviews and free lists; and only one, HELP, was the site of prolonged participant-observations. I visited 17 Partners and learned through this experience that the number of NGOs in the County willing to serve as ACCESS sites would fluctuate, in part, because of not having the necessary funds and staff to help applicants. A list of the Partners has been available on the ACCESS website since I started the research. As of January 10, 2012, DCF identified 72 partners in Anora County. Only 40 of those Partners are open to the general public and the remaining 32 Partners are accessible just to existing clientele.

**Primary Library Field Site: Library B**

I visited library branches (n=6) in the County to recruit applicants, but two served almost exclusively as the main sites for data gathering. The anonymous “Library A” was the first branch where I researched. I chose it based on its location in the city center with heavy foot traffic and its large size, which accommodates dozens of computers. However, after two months of doing participant observation, stacking books with the librarians and interviewing them, I saw hardly any patrons using ACCESS. I consulted with a senior library official for suggestions about where I could speak with more ACCESS users. This individual recommended “Library B,” which was coincidentally near HELP.

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9 The citation for this reference, among others, has been excluded to protect the identity of HELP and the public library system.
A stone’s throw away from HELP is a public library named after a prominent member of the local African American community. Less than a five-minute walk from the library is a public housing complex that developers rebuilt after the public housing and welfare reform initiatives of the 1990s, relocating many of its residents and thus removing their social support system (Greenbaum, et al. 2008). Looking at this development during my research, it resembled a suburb with maintained lawns and newly paved roads. Applying U.S. Census tract data at the level of city blocks from the 2005 and 2009 American Community Survey the neighborhood surrounding the library shows a population in excess of 3,100 of whom 95 percent are African American earning less than $19,000 in household income (Bloch, et al. 2011). This library branch and HELP were well situated as locations to recruit potential ACCESS applicants.

When I arrived at Library B in the mornings, there was often a line. As soon as the doors opened at 10am, the queue would flow inside, immediately filling the 14 public computers. I observed a similar rush for the computers during the mornings at Library A as well. Librarians confirmed during interviews that it is a daily occurrence. There were typically four library employees at Library B. Two often interacted with the public, helping them answer questions and check out materials. They alternated their duties throughout the day, including working in the back office organizing materials. I observed librarians helping patrons with computers every day I was there. Their interactions were often brief, lasting a minute or two. Occasionally the nature of the patrons’ questions would require greater involvement. Four of my interviews with library employees and all of
interviews with applicants occurred at Library B. This field site heavily shaped my insight into the experiences of library patrons and employees.

The Department of Children and Families

DCF was a “black box” to me, which I struggled to see into and find research participants. No DCF employee agreed to speak with me formally about my research. Perhaps this reluctance is due, in part, to the negative press they had received in the past. They have a history of being criticized in the media, including for shutting their physical locations where people could apply for ACCESS benefits (Moore and Newcomer 2011) and for revamping a computer system for child welfare services that cost them almost $200 million more than initially budgeted (St. Petersburg Times Editorial 2004). Maybe they were concerned about the privacy of applicants’ personal information even though my informed consent letter made it clear I did not seek such data? Maybe they did not want to cooperate with an inquiry that they could not know where it would lead? To be fair, policy workers, even program administrators work within structures and these too influence their choices. In the end, this failure to respond to my research by the agency that would most benefit from the results has posed special challenges to the data gathering process and the ultimate impact my research may have.

I emailed my informed consent letter and a concise statement about my research goals to the Tallahassee-based Director of the ACCESS program at the time, and to the manager of the region that includes Anora County. I also reached out unsuccessfully to the local DCF gatekeepers to the ACCESS
program, known as the “Community Liaison.” The Liaison is tasked with helping all Community Partners, including questions they ask on behalf of their applicants, since applicants and the broader public are not encouraged by DCF to call the Liaison directly for assistance. For the duration of my data gathering, I was unable to find a name or contact information for any Liaison on the website but Community Partners whom I interviewed did have this information. In May 2012, I found the ACCESS website displaying the name and email address of all the Liaisons in the state, including two for Anora County (DCF 2012b). No telephone number was listed. This contact information was not located on the main webpage for ACCESS applicants, but rather on a website oriented for Community Partners. The individual who held the job of Liaison and interacted with the four NGOs where I conducted interviews, as well as her supervisor, declined email and phone invitations to participate in my research.

Ultimately, archival research and statistical data served as the primary means for understanding the perspectives of DCF officials. The archival research about ACCESS came in three datasets. The first DCF gathered and I requested, namely statistical data from the ACCESS user evaluation survey, mentioned in the previous chapter, as well as the number of Computer Partners in Florida and the payments they receive for their services. I also wanted to know from where ACCESS users complete their online applications (e.g., residential areas or public places). Unfortunately, the DCF office of research that provided me with these data said they do not collect such information.
Reports about ACCESS by DCF, other government agencies, and news stories partially compensate for the absence of interviews with DCF employees. They provided substantial insights into the ACCESS program and are detailed in the previous chapter. Finally, the third dataset was the ACCESS website. It proved valuable, particularly the optional user feedback form. A brief discussion of this survey below and the data it yielded is necessary to explain why I created, in part, an ethnographic survey to compare my findings of the user experience with DCF’s reports.

The DCF User Feedback Form

During the informal phase of data gathering, I discovered DCF’s optional user feedback form, which I found problematic in both design and purpose. For example, applicants had only one opportunity to provide formal feedback about the entire ACCESS application process, and that occurred after submitting their initial application. Many just walked away from the computer after submitting it, thinking they were done, which for the most part they were. However, the webpage that appeared next on their computer screen asked them to enter a phone number where they may be contacted that very day in case a DCF employee needed to reach them. Only after scrolling further down this webpage near the bottom would an applicant see any mention of a voluntary survey. I never observed bold letters at the top of the screen announcing the survey, unlike the boldface text at the beginning of the application warning against entering fraudulent information. This sequence and wording, which deters effective reporting by users, is a design flaw.
This turned my attention to the role of design. “Design” here means more than stylistic nuance or aesthetic details. Rather it is conceiving of how and why things, services, and built environments are created and what are the experiences of users who interact with these creations. I examined how the survey itself is designed as well as the monthly data DCF used from it to draw conclusions and present user satisfaction with the program to the broader public. For example, DCF preferred to use pie charts that lump time series data together, showing high user satisfaction, versus a line graph illustrating users’ feedback over time that shows peaks and dips. The complications surrounding the ACCESS user feedback form and DCF’s presentation of data demonstrating exceedingly high user-satisfaction contrasted with my informal data gathering experiences. It also piqued my interest to conduct formal research.

**Applicants and Employees at NGOs and Libraries**

Continuing with Agar’s metaphor of the funnel, my research focus narrowed in August 2009 when formal data gathering began. My experiences until then at HELP explored informally the struggles of applicants and employees with ACCESS. I found the complexity of their challenges more varied and diffuse than described in the reports by DCF and other government agencies. The primary goal of my methodological approach during formal data gathering was triangulation, or comparing conclusions through different data gathering techniques (Angrosino 2007:35). I explain this below by discussing each method and its relevance to answering how applicants and employees (Q2a) articulated,
(b) addressed and (c) assessed the challenges to the application process. Each method was intended to answer all three parts of Q2.

Table 4.1: Formal data gathering prior to the survey

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Table 4.2: Formal data gathering with the survey

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating and Pretesting Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant-Observation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementing Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruiting NGOs for the Survey</td>
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</table>

**Participant-Observation: Articulating and Assessing Experiences and Addressing Challenges**

I relied on participant-observation for the duration of data gathering in both the informal and formal phases, as well as pre- and post-survey implementation. No other method provided me with such versatility. I included all groups of research participants – applicants and employees alike - in this method. My participation during formal data gathering ranged from helping applicants increase the font on the screen so they could read the application better, sitting
beside them answering any question that arose, aiding them to scroll up and
down on the screen, and driving them home or to a bus station, among other
things. Besides participation, my observations elicited various reactions by
passersby. Some library patrons looked at me curiously sitting with a laptop
typing whatever I saw and heard while others did not really pay attention to me at
all. Finally, visiting the other Community Partners in the County helped me to
observe the breadth of physical spaces or environments in which individuals
applied for ACCESS benefits.

Table 4.3: Amount of time conducting participant-observation during formal gathering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Hours Total</th>
<th>Days Total</th>
<th>Average Hours per Visit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HELP</td>
<td>63.25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library B</td>
<td>36.75</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library A</td>
<td>17.25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library C</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library D</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library E</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>122.75</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My formal approach to taking field notes from participant-observation can be
categorized in two ways. The first is called “continuous monitoring” where I wrote
exactly what I saw and heard as it was occurring (Bernard 2006:413). The
second approach involved expanding on what I experienced at a later time
through more reflective writing.

**Free Listing: Articulating Challenges**

The reluctance of ACCESS applicants to be interviewed was so
disconcerting that I felt asking them any questions about their age, race and
other demographic information would have made it even less likely for them to speak with me. I was then confounded when many readily agreed to participate in the survey and answer demographic questions. Of the 26 informants with whom I conducted the free lists in person, 18 appeared to be African American, six Anglo American, and two Latinos. I am uncertain about the ethnicity of the two remaining informants interviewed over the phone. There were 22 women and six men among all 28 informants who ranged in age from their early-20s to mid-60s.

Table 4.4: 28 informants completed free listing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicants from Library B (n=5)</th>
<th>Applicants from HELP (n=6)</th>
<th>Employees and a Volunteer at HELP (n=7)</th>
<th>Employees from Library A, Library B and Two Florida Libraries Outside the County (n=10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Free listing helped me to identify how informants discussed the challenges to the application process. Challenges they identified became the variables for Likert scale data on the ethnographic survey (Bernard 2006:329). During free listing, informants provide a series of items about a subject or recount every instance of an experience (Kis 2007; Thompson and Juan 2006). In my case, free listing involved informants identifying all the reasons why applicants cannot complete the ACCESS application process. When free listing I employed “cues” (Brewer, et al. 2002:343) by asking then after they finished listing their responses if there was anything else missing. Then I asked if they could “go from A to Z in your mind thinking of anything else to add to the list.” These cues encouraged one-third of the informants to add something to their original list. In terms of sufficient overlap or saturation of category types, there is no golden rule. A
smaller sample size of ten is adequate when most informants agree, though increasing the number may be necessary until a “coherent domain” is established at around 20 to 30 informants (Weller and Romney 1988:14).

I obtained the initial convenience sample of 26 through direct recruiting of applicants at HELP and Country libraries. I expanded the free-list sample to 28 when I followed up with 2 librarians in other Florida counties, referred to me by their colleagues because of their expertise in e-government. I had initially thought the data from the free list would inform the semi-structured survey, to be conducted subsequently. However, completing all the free lists with both applicants and employees at HELP, made it clear that continuing without also conducting the interviews concurrently would be ill advised given my resource constraints. Thus I conducted free listing and the semi-structured interviews in the same sitting with applicants and employees at the libraries.

**Think Alouds: Articulating and Assessing Experiences and Addressing Challenges**

Asking people to speak aloud their thoughts and feelings about an activity while they are doing it is a common method to understand how people experience a website or to evaluate a computer program (Hollan 1996; Tullis and Albert 2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.5: Eight ACCESS applicants participated in think alouds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applicants from HELP (n=6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Think alouds provide specific areas of insight into users’ experiences interacting with the design of websites, such as identifying confusing application questions or hyperlinks that do not function properly. Think alouds also offer a vocabulary
to discern how users discuss their experiences. The approach I followed involved sitting beside each applicant without using prompts and writing notes as they speak aloud while interacting with the application. I asked them at the beginning to talk aloud about what they were thinking and feeling in regards to the application, particularly about things they liked and disliked. This produced a chronicle of the problems they encountered. The process unfolded smoothly, for the most part; I asked occasional follow-up questions to clarify something they said or did.

I conducted think alouds with ACCESS applicants because I wanted to learn about their personal experiences while they were occurring, including how they worked around problems. For example, one applicant did not know how to answer a question and was unable to reach a DCF employee on the phone for assistance. She either guessed or fabricated an answer, leading her to continue with the application and saying exasperatingly: “I don’t know this shit. This is what makes people lie on these applications.”

I relied on a convenience sample at HELP and Library B similar to the free list. Eight people are sufficient for think alouds when assessing website usability (Jaspers 2009:347). All appeared to be African American, varying in age from 20 to 50; all but one were women. The amount of time spent with seven of these eight informants ranged from 17 to 92 minutes.

**Semi-Structured Interviews: Articulating and Assessing Experiences and Addressing Challenges**

After having learned a great deal about the applicants and employees at HELP during informal data gathering, formal participant-observation, and the
think alouds, I designed semi-structured interviews to gather data from employees at libraries and other Community Partners, and from library applicants. The employees added insight into the applicants’ experiences, as well as the public policies necessitating their services. I was interested particularly in the librarians, as they are among the most overlooked in the ACCESS literature. Focusing on library employees also grew out of my attempts to speak with applicants there. The few applicants with whom I spoke did not have the time to provide me any detailed information about their experiences. They seemed rushed, which is data in itself. My interviews with library applicants lasted approximately five to 15 minutes, compared to an average of about 50 minutes per interview with the other informants. Eventually, I felt my efforts to probe library applicants would best be left for the open-ended survey questions.

Table 4.6: Participation of 20 informants in semi-structured interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicants from Library B (n=3)</th>
<th>Employees from Five Different Community Partners (n=7)</th>
<th>Employees from Two Libraries in the County, Two Outside the County and an Individual with Library Management Experience at a Political Level (n=10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I used a convenience sample at the libraries to recruit the applicants and employees. I added two additional interviews after employees at participating Anora County libraries introduced me via email to colleagues in other Florida counties who worked on e-government.

I met most of the Community Partners at the DCF forum in January 2010 where I was curiously invited DCF for a half-day event that thanked Partners for their service and encourage them to recruit more applicants. My email address was likely on a local DCF employee’s list because I had attended a presentation.
of ACCESS that they conducted at a library and put my name and contact information on a sheet circulating around the room. I followed up with two of the partners I met at the January 2010 forum to arrange interviews. Like the other methods used prior to the survey I did not request demographic information because of a concern they would either not be forthcoming with their questions or that it would not strengthen rapport. These concerns have since been allayed.

The 20 informants appeared to range in age from their 30s to their 60s; 19 were women; 11 African Americans, four Latinas, three Anglo Americans, and two were interviewed over the telephone obscuring my assumptions about their racial or ethnic affiliations. All library employees and applicants, as well as a key informant from HELP who completed interviews, also did free listing.

The semi-structured interview questions for applicants included:

1) How would you describe to a close friend what it feels like to use the Internet to apply for food stamps or Medicaid?

2) What do other people say about their experiences using the Internet to apply for food stamps or Medicaid?

3) How would you complete this sentence: “Using the Internet to apply for food stamps or Medicaid is like ________________.”?

4) Can you describe all the things you did since you left your home before coming here to do the application and what do you plan to do before going home?

5) Can you tell me some experiences you have had using the Internet for government websites? For example, some folks may talk about updating their driver’s license or paying child support or taxes?
The second and third questions from above were also asked of the employees in addition to the following:

1) Can you describe the last time you helped someone with ACCESS?

2) If you had the power to change some things about the ACCESS application or the entire program then what would they be?

I conducted most interviews individually except for two pairs of employees, each at a different Community Partner. I did not record the interviews with applicants because they seemed rushed and I believed that a request to record might have discouraged them from participating. I recorded all but one of the interviews with library and NGO employees; one requested that I not use the recorder. I transcribed and analyzed all the recorded interviews. The interviews with applicants at the library occurred at a table as removed as possible from the other patrons. I spoke with library and NGO employees alone in their break room, a separate room and a private office.

**Ethnographic Survey: Articulating Experiences and Assessing Challenges**

I designed the survey through an ethnographic approach to contrast with DCF’s user-satisfaction survey. I based my questions on an iterative identification of the most important issues and obstacles to completing the application process. Specifically, the survey arose from analyzing data culled from the previous methods – participant-observation, free lists, think alouds and interviews – that helped to develop the right questions and their interpretability among respondents (Weller 1998). To help ensure clarity, I pretested the survey (n=10) (Bernard 2006:286). I then started surveying in August 2010 and concluded in
January 2011. The Community Partners I recruited to take the online survey received an email with a web link. Seven completed it. An informant from the library system emailed the survey link to many library employees in the County, producing a good response turnout (n=32). I recruited all the applicants in person from HELP (n=30) and Library B (n=30). I typed the answers verbatim for all but two of them. Typing the responses of applicants enabled those with reading and technological literacy challenges to participate. It also expedited survey completion and allowed me to include notes and follow-up questions in the survey. None of the same applicants who participated earlier in the research completed the survey. Some (n=2) of the employees at HELP did provide earlier data, and it is possible that some of the library employees may have as well, but the anonymity of the survey precludes me from knowing how many.

The survey questions can be categorized into four types of data. The first two data sets served as points to compare how respondents viewed other people's challenges to the application process. I then used some of those same variables to see how respondents assess their own challenges. My intention was to compare respondents’ answers using the same variables, but presented in a different formant (i.e., third person and first person). The first person is used on the DCF applicant feedback form.

The first data set involved Likert scale responses to the following question: “In your opinion, how often do the things below limit people from completing the ACCESS application process?” The five-point scale ranged from 0-4 with options of Does NOT Limit (0 points), Rarely Limits (1 point), Sometimes Limits (2
points), Often Limits (3 points) and Always Limits (4 points). The most frequently limiting variables received the highest points by respondents (See below).

Table 4.7: 27 variables about people’s challenges in general

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Computer/Internet/Website Is Not Working</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>Feeling Intimidated, Threatened or Fearful (e.g., benefits may decrease)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not Enough Help Available</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Having to Lie or Leave out Certain Information on the Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Public Computers Do Not Give Enough Time to Complete the Form</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Mistakes by DCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Not Having Certain Information (e.g., social security card, pay stub, case number, passwords, etc.)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>No Transportation / Too Far to Travel to a Public Computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Can't Read English or Spanish or Creole Well</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Physically or Mentally Disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Distractions/Disruptions</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Mental Difficulties from Medication, Alcohol, Drugs, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The ACCESS Website Is Poorly Designed</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Not Enough Attention to Detail, Organization and Reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Too Many Questions on the ACCESS Form</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Waiting to the Last Minute to Apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Confusing Words or Questions on the ACCESS Form</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Not Enough Space at Public Computers to Feel Comfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Can't Talk to a DCF Employee for Help</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Prejudice (e.g., Other people look down or judge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>No Clear Instructions of What is Needed to Complete the Application</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Concerns about Privacy and Trust of Personal Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Frustration and Stress</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Being Elderly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Not Enough Determination and Patience</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Being Homeless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second data set involved responses in the first person, selecting ten of the above 27 variables that were the most likely to create a contrast in responses between how respondents saw others’ challenges and their own. I asked a total of 12 questions for this data set, rephrasing the variable “design”
three times. I framed the variables as statements of agreement on a four-point (0-3) Likert scale, beginning with the phrase “In my experience and opinion.” Each increasing point on the scale meant increasing agreement with the question. The scale ranged from Disagree Completely (0 points), Disagree (1 point), Agree (1 point) to Agree Completely (2 points).

Table 4.8: 10 variables about respondents’ own experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Variables: “In my experience and opinion…”</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I do not expect the ACCESS application to ask for certain information, such as the social security numbers for everyone in a household, a life insurance policy number, etc.</td>
<td>Necessary Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I usually find someone to help me solve my problems with a computer, website or the Internet.</td>
<td>Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I usually have difficulties managing my time well.</td>
<td>Time Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I usually find it easy to read from a computer screen.</td>
<td>Language Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>When I have problems using a website, it is usually because of things I cannot control.</td>
<td>Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>When a website is poorly designed then I usually find it confusing or difficult to use.</td>
<td>Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I usually find government agencies making a lot of mistakes.</td>
<td>DCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I (would) feel a lot of stress and frustration when completing an application for food stamps.</td>
<td>Determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>When I feel a lot of stress and frustration, then I usually pay little attention to detail, organization and logic.</td>
<td>Paying Attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>It is easy for me to find a computer with an Internet connection that I can use when I want to.</td>
<td>Accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>When the wording and instructions on a website are not clear, then I usually find it difficult to use.</td>
<td>Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>It is easy for me to use a computer keyboard and mouse.</td>
<td>Technological Literacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third data set from the survey was composed of three types of questions. The first two types of questions dealt with outcomes. That is, evaluating e-governance and ACCESS overall, not the process of applying or implementing e-governance. I directed these questions at the applicants and employees alike.
1) Is it better or worse for the nation to have more people use the Internet for government stuff, such as getting food stamps, paying taxes, ordering a driver's license, etc.? Why do you feel this way?

2) Why do you think the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) created the ACCESS Internet application?

3) Finish this sentence: ‘The ACCESS application is a symbol of __________.?'

The third type of question dealt with the process of using e-government and ACCESS. I did not ask the employees the seventh question below, while applicants were asked all of them.

4) Does using the Internet for getting food stamps, paying taxes, ordering a driver’s license, etc. change how people think about the government? Why do you feel this way?

5) Finish this sentence: "Doing the ACCESS application on the Internet is like ______?"

6) Can you find the paper application on the ACCESS website? The ACCESS application can be printed off of the Internet and done on paper. If you have never tried to find the paper ACCESS application before, then open a new window in your web browser to find it now. Rank below how easy it was to find the paper version.

7) Think of a challenge you had to overcome during the ACCESS application process...can you describe what you did to overcome that challenge?

In total, 68 women and 31 men completed the survey. They ranged in age from 19 to 66. Respondents could select more than one race and ethnicity, so 60 identified themselves as African American, 26 as White, 8 as Latino, 5 as Other, 3 as American Indian and 1 as Asian American.
Ethical Considerations

Research with human subjects requires Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure that ethical standards inform the research design and are maintained throughout the research process. In place of the standard requirement of a signed, informed consent document for each participant, IRB granted me a waiver of written consent. The waiver allowed participants to choose whether they wanted any traceable tie to the research. The existence of this tie might have introduced a systematic bias into the research, as study participants may have felt making negative remarks about ACCESS could jeopardize their chance of receiving public funding or their relationship with DCF.

I relied on the following process to present research participants with the letter of consent.

First, I marked myself as a researcher with USF paraphernalia, including a thick lanyard emblazoned with “USF” in green and gold as well as an identification badge with my name on one side and USF business cards on the other. I introduced myself to people using ACCESS or waiting to use the computers, explained the purpose of the research and handed each participant an envelope containing my business card and informed consent letter. If they agreed to participate, I took them to the section of the library or NGO where my laptop was located. I would remove the contents of the envelope and review it with them. This included clarifying the background and objectives of the research and stressing that their anonymity would be preserved to the best of my ability. I also made it clear that they could elect not to answer any questions and could stop
participating at anytime. I provided each participant with the approximate amount of time it would take to speak with me and that no compensation would be provided for doing so. I informed them that their participation would be used in an attempt to improve how they and others experience the application process.

The process of receiving institutional support from HELP was easy as was interviewing employees at the various NGOs as they too were the managers. The libraries, however, first required drafting a formal letter to the head of the entire library system in the County. I then would contact the Library Chief or supervisor of a collection of library branches before I went to any particular branch. I asked their permission to research there even though their boss at the County level gave me authorization. Once the Library Chief granted me approval, I then emailed the Branch Manager for permission and attached a copy of my informed consent letter. I encouraged them to share it with their staff and I brought copies of it with me to each library. Even though most of the library employees knew who I was before my arrival at their branch, I introduced myself, explained the study and offered the envelope.

The informed consent letter was posted on the wall at HELP per my request. Most of the staff there knew what I was doing, though I also offered the envelope to each of them, and I explained the study to everyone who formally participated. For those I interviewed over the telephone, I emailed them a PDF of my informed consent letter ahead of time and reviewed it with them over the telephone before beginning. At the DCF Community Forum, I explained to everyone I met about my research and asked those most appropriate to my
research if they would participate. I then followed similar steps as described previously. I also posted the informed consent document online to all respondents at the beginning and end of the survey. I also prompted them to print it or save a digital copy. I offered a paper copy of the IRB to all the ACCESS applicants who agreed to participate in the survey and followed the same protocols mentioned previously.

Nearly six months prior to formal data gathering, I began communicating and even meeting some employees of libraries and at HELP in Anora County. I wanted my research to be of value to them and I asked what I should look for that could be of interest. Their main message to me was, “What can we do to improve how we serve our customers?” A focus on issues of design grew out of this concern to improve the way patrons of libraries and NGOs interact with the ACCESS application process.

Preserving the anonymity of research participants and the organizations that assisted me has been a top ethical concern of mine. I explained to all research participants that I would use pseudonyms to protect their identity. I had a long-standing professional relationship prior to conducting research at HELP; nevertheless, I still attempted to maintain an objective eye to preserve the integrity of the research.

I initially considered “incentives” or financial compensation in exchange for formally participating in the research, in order to recognize participants’ time commitment. However, as my research proposal evolved, it became clear that a $20 gift card would likely cost me over $1,400 if I only compensated ACCESS
applicants, and I had no funding for this expense. Instead, I attempted to exchange any assistance to applicants and employees for their time and consideration with my questions. A few examples included explaining questions on the ACCESS application, helping applicants log into their My ACCESS accounts, and sitting beside them as someone they could turn to for help if need be. I also assisted the library and NGO staff when applicants asked them questions about ACCESS that they thought I could better answer. I offered all who participated in my research the opportunity to receive a summary after its conclusion via a text message with a web link or an email or even posting them a paper copy in the mail.

Limitations to the Research Methodology

Guba (1981) and Lincoln (Schwandt, et al. 2007) provide a technique for comparing the “trustworthiness” of findings between positivistic and ethnographic approaches to research. The latter is placed here in parentheses: “internal validity” (“credibility”), “external validity” (“transferability”), “reliability” (“dependability”) and “objectivity” (“confirmability”). Among the approaches Guba and Lincoln offer to achieve credibility is triangulation of data gathering techniques, lengthy contact with the group of people being studied and sustained observations of them. I achieved each of these though having more formal interviews with applicants would have been preferable. Transferability arises from “thick description” in the findings allowing readers to decide how the conclusions are relevant in different settings and under new conditions. I will attempt to demonstrate the transferability of my analyses in subsequent chapters.
Guba and Lincoln suggest a “disinterested auditor” may be used to retrace the steps of the researcher – providing dependability – and should she arrive at similar conclusions this would achieve confirmability. Besides an independent evaluator, confirmability is aided when conducting research in a team (Guest, et al. 2006). Since I gathered these data independently, I attempted an alternative approach to achieve confirmability - using the survey to confirm whether employees’ and applicants’ observations of the challenges with completing ACCESS match my own conclusions. Moreover, the larger sample size of survey respondents was not only meant to apply certain statistical analyses but also to compare my conclusions with the smaller pre-survey sample size. This still leaves open the door to dependability, which I think triangulation of data gathering techniques can address albeit partially, since researcher bias is an inherent part of the research process.

Further limitations are the changing nature of the ACCESS application process as well as applicants’ familiarity with the program. The ACCESS website has gone through several iterations and updates since I first learned about it. For example, My ACCESS did not exist when I started informal data gathering. Applicants could not log in and check the status of their application using this function. Recertification once required applicants to redo the entire application. Today they only have to update the pertinent criteria that may have changed. Moreover, as applicants learn the system, their ability to navigate it is likely to improve, as they become more technologically literate and comfortable with the program. This is not to say all their challenges with the program evaporate, only
that some obstacles can become less of a burden over time. The structural conditions, including the public policies, are still in place. They include continuing to devolve the provisioning of in-person assistance and computer technology access from the Florida state government to local libraries and NGOs without the requisite funding.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate how the methods corresponded to the first two overarching research questions. The subsequent chapters will tease out the findings, demonstrate triangulation of my conclusions about the ACCESS program and compare these data with DCF officials’ understanding about the user experience. Moreover, the analysis of the data gathered from these methods form a model for an anthropology of e-government described in Chapter 9.
CHAPTER 5: HOW APPLICANTS AND EMPLOYEES ARTICULATE AND ASSESS THEIR EXPERIENCES AND ADDRESS THEIR CHALLENGES

Overview

The results presented in this chapter address the second overarching research question: (Q2) How do ACCESS applicants and those who assist them at public libraries and NGOs (a) articulate and (b) assess their experiences, and how do they (c) address their challenges with the application process? These data reveal the nature of the relationship between Community Partners and the DCF Community Liaison. Insights into this relationship and its effect on applicants and employees answer a part of the first overarching research question: (Q1c) how do DCF officials address the challenges of the ACCESS program among applicants and employees at public libraries and NGOs?

The findings are presented here according to the corresponding method that generated them, beginning with think alouds, then semi-structured interviews, participant-observations, free listing and ending with the ethnographic survey. This chapter contributes towards building a model for an anthropology of e-government by using methods infrequently employed when researching e-government programs, namely ethnography and triangulation (Yildiz 2007). The results presented here will be contextualized through the stages of the application process in the next chapter.
Think Alouds: Articulating and Assessing Experiences and Addressing Challenges

Think alouds provided specific areas of insight into the user experience as applicants were applying or recertifying. This method also offered a vocabulary to discern how users discuss their experiences. I analyzed these results by transposing my written notes into a word processing document and then into the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA (VERBI Software 1989-2010). I began analyzing them inductively through “in vivo” coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998:105) by using informants’ words verbatim. I then grouped the similarity of these codes together. Finally, turning to deductive analysis, I used the overarching categories from the free lists and the pertinent literature to name these groups thematically such as “frustration” or the “design” of the application process. I then crafted vignettes interweaving three foci based on my research questions, the literature review and participant-observations. These foci are: (1) specific shortcomings in the design of the application itself, (2) how applicants’ unique circumstances offer particular challenges to completing a standardized Internet application, and (3) how applicants experience DCF’s policy of transferring face-to-face assistance with the ACCESS application process – guaranteeing universal access and usability of the program – to employees at NGOs and public libraries.

The vignettes from the six applicants at HELP and two at Library B begin with those who assessed ACCESS positively. The vignettes then transition towards applicants who were more critical. The think alouds highlight the uniqueness of most of the applicants’ lives and their individual circumstances.
This contributed to the rationale for the dissertation’s title: “People…do not come with standardized circumstances.” Additionally, there is a remarkable characteristic shared by all but one of those who explicitly praised ACCESS or framed their experience as easy. That is, either I observed them struggling with the application or needing assistance, or they shared with me negative experiences in using the application. They did not explain this discrepancy; it is something I uncovered. Only pseudonyms are used here.

Nura was the one exception. She appears to be in her 20s, African American and able to use the computer mouse and keyboard at HELP with great ease. She says, “To me, it’s easy.” She doesn’t speak aloud as often as other research participants. She glides through the application until coming to the asset information section. It becomes clear to me she either does not understand what is being asked or she intentionally altered the amount of her assets, because after entering all her information, she then deletes everything and does it again. Typing quickly, Nura plows through, looking in her organized paperwork beside her as necessary. I ask how she knows to bring these necessary documents, “Cuz, I’m so used to doing it,” she responds, finishing the entire application fairly quickly in 20 minutes.

Josephine is one of the applicants from Library B. She appears to be in her 40s and African American. Though able to use the mouse, she hunts and pecks at the keyboard. She struggles to complete the sections requiring her to itemize both expenses and income. For example, she does not know how to continue when the application asks for “other sources of income” and eventually
types “00,” enabling her to go to the next screen. She then shares with me how her whole family had been receiving food stamps until one of them was incarcerated and the assistance stopped. Florida is nationally recognized for its stern approach to sanctions:

"Sanction policies vary across the states in the type of penalty imposed, and Florida’s policies are among the strictest, resulting in an immediate, full-family loss of TANF benefits as well as a reduction of food stamp benefits to the fullest extent permitted by federal law (Fording, et al. 2007:294)."

Penalizing the entire household through collective punishments speaks, in part, to the popular discourse and long held view of SNAP and Medicaid recipients being undeserving of aid (O’Connor 2001). Florida is not alone, however, as 13 other states have similar policies “that eliminate aid for the full family at the first instance of noncompliance with a program requirement” (Soss, et al. 2001:381).

Josephine recounts how another family member had accidentally put the wrong information on the application after losing a job and was unable to receive assistance because of the error. Repeatedly, Josephine tells me how “they” (i.e. DCF) closed the physical locations where people could go to complete the application and that having more of those would be helpful. When I ask her to describe her experiences using the Internet to apply for public assistance she responds, “To me it ain’t hard because I have been doing it for so long […] but for other people they can be confused.” She then adds, “It’s good.”

I met Delia at HELP. She seems to be in her late-40s to early-50s and African American. She explains how her daughter had to drive her to HELP in order to recertify her application. She calls one of the staffers over to her computer several times asking for assistance, beginning with the first screen.
She tries to find the numbers on the keyboard and attempts to use the ‘F’ keys at the very top of the keyboard, which are numbered F1, F2, up to F12. Later, she struggles to use the mouse to check the appropriate boxes for each question. Delia turns to me and says that reading all the text on the application makes her “sleepy.” Finally, when it comes to the expenses page she asks the HELP staffer for assistance again. This time the staffer asks her questions and clicks through the application quickly, occasionally assuming answers to certain questions and not even asking her. She finishes recertifying in 17 minutes. When I ask Delia about the challenges people experience with the application she concludes, “Outside of reading and questions there really isn’t a reason why they [i.e., applicants] can’t do the application.”

Zora seems to be a caring daughter-in-law, in her late-30s to early-40s. She sits near her mother-in-law who could be in her 80s. Both look African American. She begins the application quickly and confidently, clicking through the answers, sometimes without reading them. “I applied before using this system, so I know what they say,” she comments to me. However, rather than the 20 minutes it took Nura, it takes nearly 50 minutes to help her mother-in-law recertify her application. Zora questions her older companion throughout the application process about her social security number and date of birth, when she started receiving disability benefits, whether she has received disability benefits previously, whether the phone was in her name, whether she has Medicare, and whether there are any unpaid medical bills in the past three months.

As Zora is handling these questions, she also asks the HELP employee:
1) If her mother-in-law owns her home, then should she select the “homestead” option?

2) What is the property tax of her mother-in-law’s home? (The HELP employee goes to the website of the County Tax Collector’s office and finds that her property sits on two addresses, so the daughter-in-law enters the combined value of both addresses but has no place to type this near the question to explain the situation.)

3) Was there a part owner of this property listed on the Tax Collector’s website?

4) The mother-in-law receives her husband’s Social Security check. Is that considered Supplemental Security Income?

At one point, Zora requests her mother-in-law’s Medicare card, but she doesn’t have it, so she can’t continue. After seeking assistance from the HELP employee again, Zora finishes the application. I suggest that she print the screen after submitting the application and enter the few questions it asks, including a telephone number where she can be reached before 5pm that day. Despite her confidence at the beginning, the application proved challenging because of complicated questions and not having access to the necessary documents during the online application. The idea of life circumstances not fitting into standardized choices is evident.

Two applicants, Hailey and Winston, who are engaged to each other enter HELP and sit together. Hailey seems to be Anglo American and in her late-30s to early-40s and Winston appears to be African American and in his late-40s to early-50s. Neither of them could use the mouse properly. They both request the HELP staff for assistance to “roll the ball” – the scroll wheel located on the top of
the mouse that moves the screen up and down. Winston struggles with entering his date of birth and relies on a HELP employee to show him that typing “19” is necessary before his actual birth year. On separate occasions, he and Hailey accidentally hit the right click on their mouse and a small box providing them with options appears. They seem lost, but manage through it. As Winston becomes more comfortable with the mouse, he smiles, appears more energetic and says, “I’m getting to like this.” He goes to the next screen, sees a host of questions, and his demeanor becomes less enthusiastic as he groans, “Oh God, there’s a lot of questions.” He struggles to use the mouse again and Hailey helps him. He then comes to a question asking, “If anyone has refused a job in the past 60 days, enter the reason?” Winston asks Hailey for help.

Hailey, on the other hand, is more critical of ACCESS than other applicants, saying, “A lot of people don’t know how to use computers […] They shouldn’t have to do it over the line [i.e., “online”].” Hailey prefers going downtown to the main DCF office to apply. She is the only person throughout my research who ever voiced preference for going to DCF rather than an NGO or a public library. Applicants in the ethnographic survey I report on below repeatedly praise the ACCESS program because it avoids the hassle, frustration and time of going downtown to the DCF office.

From the start of the application, Hailey struggles, beginning with entering her address correctly, with which she needs a staffer’s help to do. Hailey’s face wavers about 12 to 18 inches from the screen as she leans closer, saying in a strained voice: “I should have brought my glasses. My eyes are burning.” At one
point she can’t figure out what’s going on and turns to Winston who advises her to “go back.” She does and sees the statement about the privacy of her information from the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA). She crumples at the computer, placing her head in her arms as though exhausted from exasperation. She realized the application jumped further back than she expected, requiring her to retype a couple of screens. She perseveres, finishing before Winston and then leans over to help him complete his application. After submitting it, he chooses to complete the optional screen asking for a phone number where he can be reached that day. Winston says to her he doesn’t have a phone and she tells him to enter her father’s number. They spend more than 35 minutes completing the application.

Paulina is in Library B. She seems to be in her early-20s and appears to be African American. She uses the mouse and keyboard adeptly. For nearly 30 minutes, she tries to apply for Medicaid for one of her two sons. The son for whom she is applying lives with her “auntie;” her other son resides with her parents. Taking out her cell phone, Paulina calls early in the application, asking for her auntie’s Social Security number and date of birth. She hangs up and soon comes to a question she doesn’t know how to answer: whether or not her son is disabled, since he cannot hear in one ear. She guesses and continues. She has a new job and plans to start soon, but was uncertain about how much she will be making. Should she enter this into the application? She takes out her cell phone again and uses the calculator function to determine her bi-monthly income. “They ask for too much information,” she says and continues.
Paulina enters that her auntie has assets and is prompted to another screen requesting specifics about each asset. She calls her auntie a second time for information and asks:

1) “When did you start your employment?”

2) “How many hours do you work a month?”

3) “What is the amount of your pay check before any deductions?”

Before she can continue, a librarian tells her she cannot be on her cell phone, so she hangs up. At this point in my data gathering process, the County still had a policy of no cell phone use in the library. This would soon change, in part, due to so many patrons needing to call people to complete ACCESS among other online personal business. Further this is an example of the library accommodating the unfunded mandate to assist with e-government and the ACCESS program. Unable to continue, Paulina stops on the “Current Employment Income Details” screen and closes the application. Before leaving she questions why her aunt has to disclose the value of her house and car, as though the assets would have to be sold first before her son could receive Medicaid. She says, “When you need it you got to go through the bullshit to get it […] If I had the money, I wouldn’t ask for it […] I have been putting this shit off all week.”

Orma seems to be in her late-20s or early-30s and African American. It takes her more than 90 minutes to complete the ACCESS application at HELP. She said she had to redo the entire application previously. The wording of the questions coupled with her particular life circumstances draws out the process of
applying. She had been receiving benefits while working, but lost her job a few weeks earlier. “If the job ended, why do they ask how much you made?” Orma expressed concern that DCF may take more out of her benefits if they knew how much she made in August, even though she had not worked in September. She asked, “Will they consider child care payment from last month too?” She’s not paying for childcare now because she doesn’t have a job. There are no text boxes beside each question to explain one’s individual circumstances. When I check the application again in 2012, however, DCF added a text box at the end of the application for applicants’ explanatory purposes. I am uncertain how this occurred because I could not interview the DCF staff but eventually feedback about the application process is having an impact on the design of the system. Orma ruminates on the implications of sharing her new financial situation with DCF and its possible impact on her existing benefits. She wonders why the application asks her when her mortgage will end.

DCF asked her to submit another application when she applied previously because she did so for her children rather than herself. She comes to the question asking with whom she buys and eats food and what is their relationship to her. She doesn’t like the question, stressing how identifying those relationships shouldn’t matter to DCF. She dislikes further questions about her children. She doesn’t think it’s appropriate to be asking whether a two-year-old is married or has been convicted of a crime.

Under “Absent Parent Details” there is a drop-down menu where she chooses “Jail/Short term imprisonment.” She searches for a “Long term
imprisonment” option since the father of her children will be incarcerated for 18 years. She selects the “Other” option instead. When a question appears about whether or not she has a life insurance policy she comments how difficult it is to get one.

Orma recalls how the “Fraud people [at DCF] called me and said I had lied. They didn’t say ‘lie’ they called it ‘integrity’.” This was in regards to her Section 8 housing. She said rent is $1,500 a month and the government pays $713 of it. DCF did an investigation and “It was a big ol’ mess.” This happened a couple years back. There was neither a question on the application back then nor today asking explicitly, “How much do you pay for Section 8 housing?” This error held up her food assistance for three months. She has a pink folder with her that contains at least six dividers where she organizes her paperwork. She finds the divider containing documents for the local housing authority to answer the question correctly this time. “It’s easy to get in trouble [with DCF] and hard to get out of it,” added one of the NGO employees assisting her.

To summarize the think alouds, applicants addressed their challenges by seeking assistance from the staff where they applied, persevering until they worked through it or planning to resume the process at a later time. When they assessed the application questions, they described them as unclear, tedious in number, too personal or not relevant to the application process.
Table 5.1: Time spent applying online during think alouds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Pseudonym of Applicant</th>
<th>Place of Application</th>
<th>Demographic Information Based on Appearance</th>
<th>Time in Minutes Spent Applying or Recertifying from Walking-in to Exiting (NOTE: HELP has no time limit on their computers unlike the library that allows patrons two 60-minute periods of time per day. There are a few computers that have no time limit in each library.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Orma</td>
<td>HELP</td>
<td>African American, Female, Age 20s/30s</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Zora</td>
<td>HELP</td>
<td>African American, Female, 30/40s</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Winston</td>
<td>HELP</td>
<td>African American, Male, Age 40s/50s</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hailey</td>
<td>HELP</td>
<td>Anglo American, Female, Age 30s/40s</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Paulina</td>
<td>Library B</td>
<td>African American, Female, Age early-20s</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nura</td>
<td>HELP</td>
<td>African American, Female, Age 20s</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Delia</td>
<td>HELP</td>
<td>African American, Female, Age 40s/50s</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>Library B</td>
<td>African American, Female, Age 40s</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Average Duration</td>
<td>38 Minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I turn now to the interviews to discuss how they illuminated challenges with the application process.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Articulating and Assessing Experiences and Addressing Challenges

The interviews with applicants (n=3) were all brief, lasting between five and 15 minutes. These data lack the applicants’ educational and technological literacy skills, as well as their familiarity with the ACCESS program, which limits my ability to understand and contextualize their brief answers to my questions.
The number and duration of these interviews were less than I had anticipated. The applicants simply appeared rushed and did not want to spend any time speaking in detail about their experiences. These interviews, however, do unearth two important insights. First, the informants described ACCESS as "easy" or something that really isn’t a challenge. The second is that each one of them came to the library to apply. Their accessibility to the technology and therefore the application itself required them to catch a ride, drive or walk. Though they could have understood this as a challenge, none of them articulated this, nor did they tie the larger context of the application process to their responses.

I interviewed each applicant separately at Library B. Aliases are provided here. Josephine (who also did a think aloud, above), Larisa and Brittany all appear to be African American. Josephine and Larisa seemed to be in their 40s and Brittany in her 20s. When asked how they would describe the application process to a close friend they responded respectively: “It ain’t hard.” “Just go apply. It’s easy.” “OK, I guess.” When I inquired about how other people described their experiences with ACCESS, they each responded: "[F]or other people they can be confused. My sister don't like it [...] They denied her." “They say it's better on the Internet than the paper [application]." "They like it because it's easy." I then questioned them about all the things they had to do before coming to the library and what they plan to do after leaving: Josephine went to work, then home to do some chores, then to the library and after leaving the library she’s "looking for a place to stay." Larisa had to get a ride from someone
she knows to come down to the library. Brittany walked from home. They didn’t feel like telling me what they plan to do afterward. Finally, I requested them to complete the following sentence: "Using the Internet to apply for food stamps or Medicaid is like_____." Josephine said, “It’s good.” For Larissa, it’s the “best thing that ever happened” and Brittany was the only one who compared it with social media, namely MySpace.com.

The Librarian and NGO Staff Experience

My interviews were lengthier with NGO employees (n=7) from three different organizations and their library counterparts (n = 10) from four separate library branches working in three Florida counties. After transcribing the interviews, I analyzed the results similarly to the think alouds in MAXQDA through in vivo coding first and then deductively to name the overarching categories from themes arising from the free list, think alouds, participant-observation and relevant literature. I also organized their responses by structural codes (i.e., the interview questions). Not all informants responded to the same follow-up questions since semi-structured interviews allowed them to take the conversation in unexpected directions and enabled me to probe deeper into certain areas. My analyses here center on three points based on my research questions: (1) How NGO and library employees (2) as well as applicants experience the ACCESS program, and (3) and how the employees interpret their own and their clients' experiences with DCF’s policies. Pseudonyms are used throughout.
At one NGO, an employee appearing to be Latina and in her mid-40s, named Lena, seems relieved to share with me the pressure she felt to help her largely Spanish-speaking clientele. Since ACCESS started in 2005, her organization had been asking DCF for financial assistance to help offset the costs to assist the 70 or more families who seek assistance with ACCESS each month. She received nothing until 2008, when DCF agreed to pay her organization. Unfortunately, the amount was so low they could not hire someone, even part-time at minimum wage. Here she responds to a question about how it feels to help people apply:

How would I describe it? [...] very, very stressful. We don’t have the personnel to go around to answer, to assist many of these families that come through here. We have such a large volume of individuals that come through our office, to apply for these, these types of assistance […] it would be nice if they, DCF or the ACCESS program, could possibly provide their own personnel to assist these families, you know, with the process itself. Cuz it is very time consuming.

Pat, who works at another NGO and looks to be in her 50s and African American, empathizes with her clients’ uncertainty about what happens after they submit their application online. She and they don’t know if it was received, if they will be approved and what happens next. She attempts to alleviate their stress, in part, by placing paper, pens and a "prayer box" on the table next to the computer where they apply. Reminiscent of the Western Wall in Jerusalem where prayers are written and placed inside, her clients write prayers that the application will be received or that they will be approved for benefits. She prays over the box at the end of each night for good measure.
People actually came to the door for assistance as I interviewed Gabby, an NGO staffer, appearing to be Latina and in her mid-20s. Gabby’s organization was closed so she didn’t answer the door.

You feel bad turning them away, like yesterday I had, I had people that were already scheduled in the day, but like, there was a girl that came in yesterday, she didn’t know how to use a computer. I sat her down, and she’s like, ‘I don’t know how to move the computer [mouse].’ And I felt bad, saying, I kept her, I did her application online. She’s like, ‘Oh, thank you so much. You have to, you have to realize when I go to the Department of Children and Families, they don’t, they don’t want to [help me, she said].’ She’s like, ‘They treat you like you’re ignorant and they don’t want help you. They just say, ‘Sit here’ and ‘Do it,’ and they don’t want to bother with you.’ That’s how it is.

Though I never directly posed the question, none of the NGO employees during interviews volunteered the potential legal repercussions of helping applicants and accidentally entering wrong information and being sued or having those applicants be accused by DCF of entering fraudulent information. I later learned during a casual conversation with the management at one NGO that the organization had instituted a policy asking its employees not to type anything for any applicant because of potential legal implications.

In comparison to the NGOs, I learned that library policies in some counties throughout Florida prevent librarians from typing anyone’s personal information. Librarians are even encouraged to avoid looking at people’s birthdays, social security numbers, home addresses, and other sensitive information. As one library official said to me, “We don’t know where the librarianship stops and where the liability is to help people fill out forms.”

Librarians explained two dimensions to this conundrum. The first is whether or not they could be sued if they type wrong information. A private
consultant was hired to help Florida libraries with this issue, according to a librarian named “Lucy” whom I interviewed on the phone. She described how the consultant pointed to “Good Samaritan” laws that protect libraries, in part, because there is no malicious intent. However, it appeared to Lucy that the consultant did not state that these laws indemnify a library. The second aspect of the librarian conundrum is that employees are tasked with multiple duties at various stations throughout the library on any given day. Providing a sustained period of time to help any patron can detract from the rest of their duties. Eryka, an African American-looking librarian who appeared to be in her 50s, explains the tension between wanting to help and the uncertainty of what type of help and how much she could offer.

It’s like in a Catch-22 because you did not know how far you could go and to most of us it was kind of scary, and I thought…from the staff they have been asking me, ‘How far can we help these people?’

I spoke with another librarian working in a largely rural Florida county, who said that librarians are neighbors and close friends with the patrons, so not assisting them would be unthinkable. However, she noted that providing these patrons with a lot of attention can extend the time to complete ACCESS because when anyone else requires the librarian’s assistance they will attempt to help them as well.

Employees Reflecting about Applicants’ Experiences

Allison, an Anglo American-looking librarian who seemed to be in her early-40s, compared ACCESS applicants’ experiences with her own insights, having applied in another state for social services before the e-government
format for SNAP benefits was available. She found technology today could serve as a helpful buffer between applicants and rude social workers. Moreover a public library to her is a more hospitable environment to apply than a welfare office. She explained why reflecting on her experiences:

Everybody was waiting in this room. It took a day. When you got your appointment, you didn’t get to choose it. It was very dehumanizing, and just, they did everything to make you just want to give-up and go ‘Forget about it, I’m going to eat moldy bread. I’m going to forget this.’ There was not customer service. Any problem you had they’ll throw you out, even when you waited weeks for this appointment [...] it [ACCESS] just seems like a huge improvement to me. I think it’s a huge improvement over, at least what my experience was in a different state. […]because in Florida I can] sit in a library and I type that up while my kids are reading books or playing.

Conversely, another librarian, Lucy, said, “It must be very humiliating to come into a library in multiple levels.” The first being that one is applying in public rather than the privacy of home and the second is confessing to a stranger one’s need for assistance because of an inability to type, use a mouse or even read. She also shared with me four different types of applicant fear: They include fear (1) of losing data, (2) of breaking the computers, (3) in not believing one’s educational or technological literacy is sufficient to complete the application, (4) and of the unknown in not being able to see the information anymore. When applicants submit their application online, “It’s like a television transmission. It goes to some ether somewhere […] You are trusting the information is entered correctly.”

Besides stigma and fear, another librarian who appeared to be African American and in her 60s, named Serena, touched upon the isolation applicants can feel when applying in a public place.
I think it feels confusing and intimidating and...I think there's an isolation of not having somebody who cares about that outcome of your application there [beside you]. It's just you and your numbers and your personal information.

She goes on to reflect aloud the challenges of applicants by invoking the “dysfunction of poverty” and describing it as:

If you're living in that dysfunctional space or you're trying to live around drug addicts or you're trying to live around chronic illness or you're trying to live around chronic horrible poverty you know, where you're in some kind of communal situation; the idea of keeping a pass, a list of all the pin numbers and passwords and stuff like that, it's just ludicrous.

Widening the scope beyond the application itself, Karen, an apparently African American NGO employee in her 40s, describes the entire application process as a “game,” identifying three of its attributes.

The Game

The first attribute and a trope of this research is recognizing that regardless of individual circumstances, the online format does not distinguish between applicants. As a result, applicants often have to do extra things not explicit in the application in order to receive benefits.

I had a case today where, the client has been sanctioned [or penalized by DCF] because she didn't comply with child support. She did it [applied for SNAP] last year and the situation is the same. The other parent is dead. So do you think he's going to come back to life? So why should she have to go back to child support again [to explain her situation so she doesn't get sanctioned again]? The client was very upset, and I don't blame her. He's dead. [...] They can see that in the system.

The second attribute is motivation. Allowing the application process to unfold as a passive recipient rather than a proactive applicant may create a pause in or termination of benefits.

What DCF needs to automatically do is to let people know when the interview is [ahead of time...] If you are homeless, you are required to have a phone interview once a year. So, like in the
last couple of months, since I found this out, this, is part of the game. My clients who apply homeless, I automatically send them to the phone in my office to do the formal interview, so that part is taken care of.

Finally, there is learning to work around the system or find a shortcut in order to overcome hurdles that can accumulate into a formidable deterrent to applying. Take, for example, the toll free number that is perpetually clogged with people attempting to speak with a DCF employee.

If I were a client and I had to call customer service and never know that I had to push, just zero four times to get a human. That’s a game. Because that should be stated to me somewhere that how do I get to a live person?

Understanding the “game” and its effects on applicants, NGO staff and librarians provides an alternative perspective to how DCF articulates applicants’ challenges.

**DCF and Applicants**

Both librarians and NGO employees described how the program appeared to be designed intentionally to frustrate people to the point of not completing the application process. One of the librarians explains:

Before this [ACCESS] started, you walked into a government agency, there’s a person behind the desk, they call your number, and you gave all that information to that person, cuz that person was typing in your information. Now, you are the person who’s typing in the information and if you don’t have skill or knowledge of how to use the keyboard or a computer…you’re going to give up.

An NGO employee named Karen provides another example for me:

Marc – One [applicant] can use an application for 60 days, unless…?

Karen – They [applicants] can ‘reuse,’ I guess is the word, reuse the application that was denied up to 60 days unless they were denied for a phone interview […]

Marc – So, is it in DCF’s interest to have people miss that phone interview, because they would have to reapply?
Karen – Good question. That means they could shut that case and go on to the next one...and then people are just so frustrated, and that way, nine times out of ten, they [go without benefits] for two, three, four months [and] because they’re so frustrated, sometimes they never reapply […] What DCF needs to automatically do is to let people know when the interview is [ahead of time].

DCF’s policy of not providing in-person assistance at its physical locations (Cody, et al. 2008) and instead having people call a toll free number creates particular stress for applicants. One NGO employee explains:

They [DCF] sit them there. They sit them there in front of the computer and they cannot help them. That’s it. So they get discouraged and they leave. They get up and they leave or many of them enter incorrect information and that’s what happens. Their application is canceled out.

The employees at libraries and NGOs said they receive this stress from the applicants with whom many of the employees expressed empathy towards both verbally and through my observations.

DCF and Community Partners

The nature of the ACCESS program and the Community Partner network allow for Medicaid insurance companies to recruit NGOs directly into the DCF Community Partner network. I was unable to locate how much was paid to which company. But, I learned that WellCare is one of them. Brianna, who worked at a NGO, shared with me how a WellCare representative approached her organization to see if her organization would be a Community Partner. She agreed as long as WellCare provided the computer and someone to staff it. Neither she nor her staff had the time to provide these services and thought a computer in their lobby would be helpful to their clients. Providing the computer and listing her organization on DCF’s website as a Community Partner occurred
rather quickly. It took much longer and many calls later to have them provide a staff person. Brianna said someone came for about half a day, said they would return and never came back. Sometime later WellCare returned to get their computer. DCF kept her NGO’s name and address on its website for many months even though her organization contacted DCF stating that they were no longer a Community Partner. “We still had people come in because our name was still on the list.”

An NGO staffer working at a different organization had a much more positive experience with DCF local representation, known as the “Community Liaison.” The Liaison’s job is to help Community Partners, provide them with training, make sure they have enough brochures and relevant program literature and keep them informed of any changes to ACCESS. As explained to me by the same NGO staffer, there was only one Liaison for Anora County and she was not tasked with helping other counties. I confirmed this in DCF’s Community Partner Liaison Directory that has no telephone number, mailing address or physical address for any Liaison, only a name, title, county and email address (DCF 2012a). This Liaison did not respond to email or phone requests for an interview.

The Liaison has the power to function as a caseworker for any applicant, because they can access DCF’s computer database to find all the necessary information for any applicant’s status, reason for denial, etc. While acquiring the telephone number for the Liaison can be a feat, having the Liaison call a Partner back or help them in the first place is subjective. The Liaison’s access to
insider/applicant data can translate into benefits for applicants, maximizing a Community Partner’s ability to help his or her clients.

I can honestly say, she called, she checked up on us, she brought in materials […] But for the first year [before this new Liaison was hired and we developed a good working relationship], it was just like I was on my own. I was just finding my way through the field. But once I met her […] that’s when everything got easier. She turned out to be a godsend actually. Like instead of falling through the cracks that are open, you’re still holding on to them, only because I had that connection. But that shouldn’t, I guess my biggest point is, that shouldn’t be a secret. The Community Liaison should be for everybody.

This NGO employee went on to tell me how she was able to create her own system for helping applicants by relying heavily on the Liaison for assistance and learning the system on her own. She created a workaround in essence to accomplish a task within the existing confines of how the application process is designed. No one else I interviewed mentioned such access to the Liaison even though I asked about their rapport with this individual. The NGO employee who had this close relationship with the Liaison was working at one of the few Community Partners paid by DCF.

Comparatively, someone else working at a separate NGO who also received DCF payments described her relationship with the Liaison largely through periodic site visits to make sure they have DCF flyers, business cards with the toll free number, computers, a copier and a fax machine. The visits from the Liaison lasted no more than 20 minutes. She found the Liaison to be of little, if any help, towards her or her clients. Finally another NGO I visited that was not paid by DCF also received the same kind of hands-off Liaison treatment. Clearly variation exists in the services DCF provides Community Partners that can translate into material differences for the clients of these Partners.
standardized application process belies the subjective outcomes of the program depending, among others things, the Liaison-Partner relationship.

DCF and Public Libraries

None of the libraries in Anora County are formal Community Partners, but local DCF representatives were attempting to have them sign an agreement. This would likely benefit DCF by demonstrating how many institutions are “willing” to help the public without additional state expenditures. In return, DCF representatives said they would provide libraries with special services. This was made evident to a librarian who contacted DCF about a problem with the ACCESS website. One librarian explains:

She [another librarian] told them [DCF] that for about a week and a half all the [County] libraries could not access the first page of the application. The response she received was along the lines of ‘Well, if the [County library system] was a partner then they would have our phone number to address such problems.’

Not only is this an outcome of the unfunded mandate of e-government, it also symbolizes the importance of having a rapport or even a telephone number of the right DCF employee to call for assistance.

The librarians I interviewed, however, see themselves in this network whether they want to be or not. Mia, a librarian interviewed over the phone, explains:

[An] ‘unfunded mandate’ […] is what many people call this project […] ‘We are going to take out the middle person, the social worker, and empower the people to do it themselves’ […] It basically yanked the rug from underneath a lot of people […] We have been unhappy with how the state [has handled this process…] But we have embraced it.

DCF’s policy obligates library involvement and it began tacitly soon after ACCESS came into being. One of the librarians told me how local DCF
employees “denied it for many years” that they were sending people to the libraries, including to her directly. Then one day someone walked up to her with official DCF documentation and with her name on it as a library contact. She complained to DCF directly but nothing could stem the influx of ACCESS applicants requesting her assistance and those of her colleagues. Another librarian shared a similar story:

> [T]here was an agency at one point, sending people to us [telling people,] ‘Oh they’ll do your ACCESS Florida there.’ When we were having to redirect [these applicants], I contacted that agency a couple times, saying ‘You guys, it’s not accurate. You need to let people know, we are not allowed to fill out your form for you.’

The librarians often described the stress and even aggressiveness of patrons when informing them that no one at the library would complete the application for them.

A tangential issue that emerged out of the interviews was whether or not librarians should be providing social service assistance. One library official captures this well in saying she hears librarians saying, “It is a burden […] I have to do all the work of social service workers […] We don’t know where to draw the line […] between being a librarian and being a social worker.” When I asked where she draws the line, she replied that she doesn’t.

Library employees are on the losing end of the proliferation of e-government programs, as more applications become automated and local offices for public services close. While there are online tutorials meant for Community Partners that librarians can access online and DCF has conducted trainings at various library branches, ACCESS is but one of many such programs. Librarians simply do not have the time to stay abreast of each e-government application
process and the changes or updates made to it. Many in the public are left with few other alternatives to receive in-person assistance in a safe, welcoming environment with the necessary technology than a library. As this is occurring, the total operating income for Anora County public libraries shrank by more than 12 percent between 2010 and 2011, and statewide for the same period operating income fell by seven and a half percent. This is according to the Annual Statistics Report for Public Libraries, accessed by an employee with Florida’s Department of State, Division of Library and Information Services (Personal Communication, 2012). Reducing funding to public libraries is occurring nationwide: “Nearly 60 percent of public libraries reported flat or decreased operating budgets in FY2011, up from 56 percent in FY2010 and 40 percent in FY2009” (Hoffman, et al. 2011:8). Mandatory closures of library branches throughout the year have reduced the total number of hours Florida librarians worked in FY 2011 by 21 percent compared with FY 2010 (DCF 2011b:50).

**Participant-Observation: Articulating and Assessing Experiences and Addressing Challenges**

The findings from participant-observation reinforce most of the data from the free lists, interviews and think alouds. I observed applicants requesting assistance at all stages of the application process, from understanding questions to reading DCF letters received by mail, to activating their Electronic Benefits Transfer card (i.e., SNAP debit card). Many struggled to type and use the mouse. It was common for them to labor through the application after receiving a brief tutorial by a librarian or NGO staffer about how to use the technology.
The level of demand for computers in the County is so high that people wait in front of libraries and HELP each morning just to use the Internet. A time limit was imposed for two hours total per day at every library with each allotment divided into two 60-minute sessions. Once the first hour is up the patron has to return to the self-check-in kiosk and often wait 30 to 90 minutes to get another computer. HELP has not yet found it necessary to implement a similar time limit. My observations varied widely in the amount of time needed to complete the application depending on applicants’ educational and computer skills as well as their familiarity with ACCESS and the availability of assistance. I regularly observed people complete it in one sitting and often under 30 minutes and other times applicants need far more time and had to return with the necessary documentation to answer the appropriate questions.

At Library B, applicants typically asked for assistance with finding the ACCESS website, starting the application, the wording on the application, how to create or log-in to their My ACCESS account, faxing and printing. Since HELP had staff specifically to assist applicants, they were able to address nearly all the applicants’ needs, beyond what I saw at Library B. Finally, more applicants at Library B than HELP completed the application without requesting any assistance from employees or fellow applicants. This may be due, in part, to HELP being so much smaller than any library. All applicants need to do at HELP is just turn to ask an employee for assistance without getting out of their chair. At the library, people either need to grab the librarian’s attention or leave their computer to go ask for help. Those who know how to temporarily lock the
computer, preventing anyone else from using it, can feel safe walking away from it to find a librarian. Otherwise, they may worry someone will take it and then they will have to restart their application and wait again until another computer is available. Further, most of the computers in the library have a timer counting down on their screen. So applicants are continually reminded of the finite duration to use the computer. In response to the time pressures library ACCESS users may encounter, there are specially designated computers in each library branch that do not have time limits. Patrons can access government websites and use popular software programs for word documents, spreadsheets and presentations. Depending on the library there are typically one to five of these computers. Unfortunately, many people I observed did not know they could use these computers for ACCESS, which were often unoccupied.

Two other points: At both HELP and Library B, younger people frequently sat beside someone who appeared much older, typing the application for them. Secondly, there were immediate, environmental obstacles to the application, such as children running around disrupting patrons; background noise from chatter and cell phone calls impacting concentration; and attempting to figure out how to print or not having the coinage to do so. Applicants never mentioned these obstacles in any phase of the research, although employees did. It is unclear whether applicants are inured to these stressors compared to a crowded welfare office or other complexities in the rest of their lives. Others more accustomed to concentrating in quieter spaces would find this incredibly
distracting. In sum, participant-observations helped to reveal the breadth of challenges to apply for benefits through ACCESS.

**Visits to Other Community Partners in the County**

Besides the four NGOs in Anora County that participated in my research, I visited 17 other DCF Community Partners in the County. As mentioned previously, their names and addresses were photocopied by DCF and distributed to the public at its former downtown office. I visited the Partners to recruit employees to take my survey and to understand more about the diversity in environments in which applicants use public computer terminals to complete the application. I was surprised to learn how many of these organizations on DCF’s list were not Partners at all (n=3) or were closed (n=6). Only eight of the 17 organizations were actually open and identified themselves as Community Partners.

I went during the business hours and days printed on the photocopied paper. Four were closed. Two of them had no ACCESS signs or insignia on the exterior of their office – common to all the other Partners - so they may have cut their ties to DCF entirely. Employees at three other organizations said they were not an ACCESS location. An additional organization that DCF advertised as being open to the public had a guard out front and required an appointment to enter the premises. Another organization had the wrong phone number and address.

I spoke to employees or the management at the eight active Partners. According to them and from what I saw, the assistance provided to applicants
varied widely. One place that helped immigrant populations had no computer open to the public. Instead they said they typed the entire application for people with no charge. I could not confirm this “no charge” policy. One Partner told me during an interview that she heard of people paying others to complete the application for them and even one applicant during my survey said he charges people to help them with ACCESS. It is unclear how widespread this phenomenon exists, but it is not unreasonable to image someone paying for help in the absence of other alternatives.

At one Partner, a community clinic, I entered a waiting room about 12 feet by 12 feet packed with people coughing loudly and wiping leaky noses. A computer was tucked away in a corner that applicants could use. Other locations were quiet and spacious. Some places had at least one staff person to help, while the staff at other Partners said it was really up to the individual to know how to type, read and navigate through the application process.

Overall, the findings from my participant-observations indicated that people who use public computers to complete the ACCESS program face multiple challenges at different stages in the process. As I created the survey based on these and the other research findings, I thought the survey would tell me the same. Moreover, I assumed the applicants would be particularly critical of the State government, DCF and the ACCESS program. I was mistaken.

**Free Listing: Articulating Challenges**

Free listing helped me to identify how informants discussed the challenges to the application process. I analyzed the responses of informants (n=28) first
inductively by identifying the thematic similarities and differences in the answers to the free list question: “List every reason why someone cannot successfully complete the ACCESS application process?” I entered the handwritten responses to my questions onto a spreadsheet. I then relied on “in vivo” coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998:105) by using a word or phrase verbatim from the informants to identify 40 unique themes or subcategories. I then grouped these subcategories into 18 overarching categories based on their similarities (Ryan, et al. 2000), the research questions, and the tension between structures that are socioeconomic, political or physical and personal agency.

Free listing was not used here as an end to itself but rather a beginning to understand how informants articulate the various challenges to the application process. The point was not to determine which overarching category was most or least frequently identified, but rather whether these categories are shared to some degree among a smaller sample population. These results also helped me to triangulate findings from other research methods.

As shown in Figure 5.1 below, the overlapping themes for each of the four groups of informants (i.e., applicants and employees at libraries and NGOs) are provided. The five most frequent categories include: (1) the design of the ACCESS application website itself (i.e., usability) as well as the design of the policy structuring the entire application process (i.e., the Community Partner network), (2) having the necessary documentation to enter into the online application, such as social security numbers and life insurance policy information of everyone in the household, (3) paying attention (i.e., “personal responsibility”)
to the wording and prompts of the application, the deadline DCF provides to complete renewal of the application and one’s own behavior when interacting with others in libraries and NGOs, (4) mustering sufficient *determination* to complete the process, and (5) possessing the *technological literacy* to do the application online. Each of the four colors in the bar graph represents a different group of informants.

![Bar Graph](image)

**Figure 5.1:** Frequency of free listed items by informant group

It is worth noting how applicants reported obstacles grouped under the category “paying attention” far less often than the employees at the libraries and NGOs.
This follows a pattern in the findings across the research methods – that there is inconsistency between what applicants self-report as their challenges with the application process and what employees and myself infer to be their challenges.

It is also noteworthy that applicants did not cite time limits as a problem.

The computer software *Visual ANTHROPAC* (Borgatti 2003) offered another perspective for noticing overlapping responses. For this analysis, I divided the four groups of informants in two with all the applicants in one group and the employees at NGOs and libraries in another. Notice the close, but not identical agreement between the two groups among the top five most frequently cited categories in Table 5.2 below, highlighted in the shaded boxes.

**Table 5.2: Frequency of free listing categories across informants split between applicants and employees of NGOs and libraries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Overall Frequency (%)</th>
<th>Applicants’ Frequency (%)</th>
<th>Employees’ Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Necessary Documentation</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological Literacy</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Literacy</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying Attention</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distractions</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically Disabled or Impaired</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. Personal Problems</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Available on Computers</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly or Homeless</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentally Impaired</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ranking of the most frequent obstacles here differs from the bar graph. This is because *Visual ANTHROPAC* looks at the frequency in the distribution of categories across informants. The bar graph counts multiple responses by an informant within each category. This explains why data from the bar graph show *design* was more concentrated between library and NGO employees whereas looking at the data from the table above the category *necessary documentation* was more widely articulated across the four groups of informants.

We would expect some level of overlap in the responses of informants even though they represent diverse opinions. This is because they are participating in similar public spaces that offer access to Internet-ready computers, and they are interacting with the same e-government program. At what level of agreement do informants provide sufficient overlap or saturation? There is no golden rule. A smaller sample size of 10 is adequate when most informants agree, though increasing the number may be necessary until a “coherent domain” is established at around 20 to 30 informants (Weller and Romney 1988:14). The bar graph and the table show that the four groups of informants agreed on five of the top six categories. Ultimately, free listing served its dual purpose: 1) helping me to understand how applicants and employees at public libraries and NGOs articulate the challenges to the ACCESS application process and 2) informing the survey design.

**Survey: Articulating Experiences and Assessing Challenges**

These findings are presented as three data sets. The first is demographic data to give an overview of the applicants (n=60) and employees (n=39). The
second data set looks at how applicants assessed other applicants’ obstacles with ACCESS. It then describes how applicants assessed the degree of some of these same obstacles in their own lives. It also includes employees’ observations of these same obstacles. Finally, the last data set is both employees' and applicants’ responses to mostly open-ended questions about their ACCESS experience.

Demographic Data

Respondents self-reported all these data. The applicants varied from 19 to 66 years in age with a mean age of 40. The employees’ age ranged from 21 to 66 and averaged 44. The applicants and employees were majority female, 63 percent and 77 percent respectively.

![Figure 5.2: Applicants’ ethnicity and race](image)

![Figure 5.3: Employees’ ethnicity and race](image)
Figure 5.4: Applicants' highest level of formal education

Less than 7 percent of applicants had a four-year college degree and more than 21 percent of them had not completed high school or earned a GED.

Figure 5.5: Employees' highest level of formal education

About 50% of applicants were at Library B or HELP for other reasons besides applying, recertifying and checking their status. For example, they were looking for jobs, creating a resume, seeking unemployment benefits or checking email, among other things. 73 percent of the applicants were unemployed and 7 percent worked full-time.

In terms of technological accessibility and usability, 58 percent of applicants did not have a working computer at home and 80 percent did not have
Internet access at home. Nevertheless, 68 percent agreed with the statement, “It is easy for me to find a computer with an Internet connection that I can use when I want to” and 80 percent agreed with the statement, “It is easy for me to use a computer keyboard and a mouse.” The applicants’ responses conform to the assumptions of DCF that digital inclusion in society is no longer resource dependent. Essentially, this stream of thought concludes that anyone can easily access anything e-government related at a library or community organization if they don’t have home access. This may be true for some, but my interactions with applicants during informal and formal data gathering for over two years clearly demonstrate that accessibility and usability of the technology consistently pose challenges to diverse applicants (i.e., middle-age people to seniors, non-Native English speakers, the illiterate, homeless people, and those with physical and mental impairments).

Comparing Observed and Self-Reported Data

The first data set involved Likert scale responses to the following question: “In your opinion, how often do the things below limit people from completing the ACCESS application process?” There were 27 variables. The five-point scale ranged from 0-4 with options of Does NOT Limit (0 points), Rarely Limits (1 point), Sometimes Limits (2 points), Often Limits (3 points) and Always Limits (4 points). Therefore the most frequently limiting variables received the highest points by respondents.

The employees of libraries and NGOs identified the following as the top three variables that limit applicants:
1) Frustration and stress (2.87)

2) Not Having Certain Information (e.g., social security card, pay stub, case number, passwords, etc.) (2.82)

3) Can't talk to a DCF employee for help (2.64)

While this set of questions was directed towards other applicants’ challenges, there was another set of questions requiring responses in the first person. This involved taking a subset of the above 27 variables. I asked a total of 12 questions in this subset, presenting the variables as statements of agreement on a four-point (0-3) Likert scale, beginning with the phrase “In my experience and opinion.” Each increasing point on the scale meant increasing agreement with the question. The scale ranged from Disagree Completely (0 points), Disagree (1 point), Agree (2 point) to Agree Completely (3 points). The top three statements applicants collectively disagreed the most about include:

1) I usually have difficulties managing my time well (1.26)

2) I feel a lot of stress and frustration when completing an application for food stamps (1.27)

3) I do not expect the ACCESS application to ask for certain information, such as the social security numbers for everyone in a household, a life insurance policy number, etc. (1.54)

4) I usually find government agencies making a lot of mistakes (1.54)

Comparing the above two sets of responses, the employees identified stress and frustration as the biggest challenge to people completing the application process. Conversely, the second most common statement with which applicants disagreed the most was considering the application stressful. This is surprising. It
could be true that these 60 applicants largely did not find the application stressful. This may be a result of their familiarity with the application and possessing the technological skills. Perhaps in comparison to other stressors in their lives this was relatively minor. They may also have received enough assistance from the employees to not feel stressed. Still, it is perplexing and yet not unique when considering the results from the think alouds and how individuals would struggle with ACCESS and yet not identify their struggles with weaknesses in the design of program.

What about comparing employees’ and applicants’ responses in their rankings of the 27 most frequent obstacles that people in general experience while applying? The top three reasons applicants provided were:

1) Being homeless (2.93)
2) Waiting to the last minute to apply (2.92)
3) Cannot read English or Spanish or Creole well (2.90)

While each of the employees’ responses dealt with applicants’ experiences during the process, the applicants identified variables existing prior to applying. Further, applicants view other people’s poor time management as being the second most common reason for not completing ACCESS. However, the previous results show applicants disagreed the most that they have problems managing their own time. This could be true or they might be wrong in their attributions of others. But based on the evidence thus far, I suspect their descriptions of other people’s challenges are more in line with their own difficulties. I think it may be easier to discuss the shortcomings of others than
one’s own deficiencies, particularly to a stranger, which may cause personal embarrassment (Goffman 1959).

What about the variables representing applicants’ own behaviors on which they agreed the most? They reported:

1) I usually find it easy to read from a computer screen (2.08)

2) It is easy for me to use a computer keyboard and a mouse (2.02)

3) When a website is poorly designed, then I usually find it confusing or difficult to use (1.99)

Rather than making applicants feel uncomfortable by asking them directly about their reading literacy and comprehension issues, they were asked whether they can easily read from a computer screen. Perhaps the question should have been more direct. They agreed the most on this one variable, which neither the employees nor I did. It is also noteworthy that applicants recognized how poor website design can detract from their usability of ACCESS. Yet, at no time did they or any applicant throughout my data gathering ever invoke “design.”

Employees did at times, but infrequently. There is a subtlety to design and its embedded nature and yet it shapes nearly all aspects of the ACCESS application process. This includes the arrangement of computers to the desktop icons applicants select in order to access the application itself and to the wording of the letters applicants receive in the mail from DCF, just to name a few.

Open-Ended Survey Questions

I asked three types of open-ended questions. The first two types were at the macro-level, specifically the national movement of expanding e-government
and the Florida policy creating and sustaining the ACCESS program. The third type of question was at the micro-level, focusing on the respondents’ experiences with the application process. I analyzed these data in MAXQDA first inductively using *in vivo* coding and by organizing similar responses. I then grouped the responses into overarching categorizes deductively, applying themes that arose through the other methods.

I analyzed all of the employees at NGOs and libraries together (n=39) and did the same for applicants (n=60) in another group. For some questions, however, I separated the two groups of applicants by location type in order to contrast their opinions and experiences. At times, respondents gave multiple answers to each question. Rather than excluding any answer, they were all counted. At other times, respondents chose not to answer every question.

The inconsistency between self-reported and observed behaviors is further evident here, highlighting the importance of triangulation in e-government research. For example, applicants reported having few difficulties typing and that they struggled independently more often with their challenges than seeking assistance. The NGO applicants, however, received constant assistance from HELP employees and myself. None of the groups of respondents ranked accessibility of the ACCESS application as being a major concern; some groups even ignored the question outright. This is curious considering that all of the applicants had to apply in public places and many had to wait to use the computer, particularly in the library.
Question 1: Is it better or worse for the nation to have more people use the Internet for government stuff, such as getting food stamps, paying taxes, ordering a driver's license, etc.? About 82 percent of all applicants said it was better for the country and employees’ responses were slightly higher at 85 percent. Question 1 was meant to understand respondents’ broader vision of how e-government is shaping our society. Employees and applicants provided the same two reasons for why this is so. The first is that it improves government \textit{efficiency}, by reducing time and administrative costs, responding to shrinking of the government workforce, and lessening paperwork, errors, and individual expenses. The second most common theme was that e-government is accessible and usable. These themes are defined as access to the application anytime through the Internet, improves ease and convenience for the general population as well as those who are disabled or without reliable transportation. Applicants’ most common critical responses were that face-to-face communication and assistance is irreplaceable, the risk of identity theft is serious and not everyone has access to the requisite technology.

Question 2: Does using the Internet for getting food stamps, paying taxes, ordering a driver's license, etc. change how people think about the government? Yes or no? Similarly to Question 1, I also asked, “Why?” 52 percent of applicants said “yes” and employees responded even higher at 64 percent. The top reason from all the applicants – volunteered by more than 40 percent – can be captured by what one said, “It makes the government feel even more impersonal and uncaring.” Employees identified this feeling as their second highest ranked
response. Their most favored response, however, was what one said: it betters “government’s red tape reputation [because interacting with them now becomes easier and faster].” The second most agreed upon reason by applicants – at around 37 percent – can be summarized by the following comment one said: “No, why should just doing it on the Internet change the way you think.”

Although Question 1 invited respondents to discuss how e-government is shaping the public’s relationship with the government, no one mentioned this. However, they did so for Question 2, where nearly a quarter of responses from both groups of applicants described e-government as making government in general more “impersonal and uncaring.” All groups of respondents cited improving government efficiency as the most likely way people would think differently about government. The emphasis by respondents on efficiency mirrors an understanding of taxpayer citizenship. Efficiency is a recurring theme when analyzing respondents’ answers to other questions, including why DCF started ACCESS in the first place.

Question 3: Why do you think the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) created the ACCESS Internet application?
Figure 5.6: All library applicants provided 42 total responses to Question 3

Figure 5.7: 26 NGO applicants provided 50 total responses to Question 3

Figure 5.8: All employees provided 72 responses to Question 3
The purpose of this question was to understand how research participants interpreted the state government’s intention behind creating ACCESS. All three groups of respondents selected *efficiency*, *accessibility* and *usability* as the most common reasons, which correspond with DCF’s explanation for creating the program. To *discipline and punish* applicants as well as making life *easier for DCF* were also reasons shared among all three groups. While the applicants’ responses to this question situated ACCESS within the broader context of living in a *technological world*, none of the employees expressed this sentiment. None of the employees also described ACCESS as being created in order to *help* people beyond making it more efficient, accessible and usable. However, the percentage of responses from Library applicants who said “to help” was seven times greater than their NGO counterparts.

Question 4: Finish this sentence: "The ACCESS application is a symbol of __________?" Even though I pretested this question with applicants, I found that they struggled with it. While they read it off the computer screen, I rephrased it for them by asking, “What does the ACCESS application represent to you?”

![Library Applicants](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Unanswered (Blank)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Today’s technological world&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Access to community services&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.9: 28 library applicants provided 30 total responses to Question 4
Figure 5.10: 26 NGO applicants provided 30 total responses to Question 4

Figure 5.11: 31 employees provided 41 total responses to Question 4

Question 4 provided another way to ask respondents to reflect on the ACCESS program overall, this time using a metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 2003). The percentage of employees’ responses was more critical than both groups of applicants combined. The responses from NGO applicants were more critical and praiseworthy of ACCESS than the library applicants. In fact, this question marks a turning point in how the groups of respondents describe ACCESS. The employees become consistently more critical than either group of applicants and NGO applicants lean more negatively than library applicants. Negative survey responses often included the lack of human contact, the digital divide, funding cutbacks, frustration, anarchy, and shifting government
responsibility from one agency to another. Positive comments include praise and compliments for what the programs does for people and society, including themes such as “ease,” “efficiency,” “justice,” “freedom” and “help.”

Question 5: Finish this sentence: "Doing the ACCESS application on the Internet is like ______?"

Figure 5.12: 28 library applicants provided 31 total responses to Question 5

Figure 5.13: 29 NGO applicants provided 31 total responses to Question 5
This question also used a metaphor – or a simile to be more precise – in order to understand how respondents discuss the process or actual act of applying. The employees were nearly as critical as all the applicants combined. Common responses include “pulling teeth,” “doing something difficult,” “takes a lot of time” and “hell.” Library applicants provided twice as many positive descriptions about their experiences than NGO applicants even though HELP has staff dedicated to assist its clients with the ACCESS application, unlike the library. Two of the most frequent positive responses from applicants were “a walk in the park” and “a piece of cake.” Some applicants provided additional details expressing appreciation for not having to spend time going to DCF, waiting in line and speaking with rude social workers. Comparing ACCESS to a job application was a common theme among all groups.

Question 6: Think of a challenge you had to overcome during the ACCESS application process; can you describe what you did to overcome that challenge? This two-part question was directed only at applicants. They described their challenge and how they overcame it. The first pair of charts below

Figure 5.14: 39 employees provided 40 total responses to Question 5
illustrates the challenge identified by library applicants and how they overcame those challenges. The second set of charts provides the NGO applicants’ responses.

Figure 5.15: 22 library applicants provided 30 total responses to the first part of Question 6

Figure 5.16: 22 library applicants provided 22 total responses to the second part of Question 6
More than a quarter of both groups of respondents could not recall a challenge. This is surprising and yet correlates with previous findings in applicants' remarks that other people may have challenges, but not themselves. In terms of those who overcame their challenges, the percentage of responses from NGO applicants who struggled independently was more than two times greater than the library applicants. This occurred in light of the NGO applicants applying at HELP where there was staff to assist specifically with the application process.
The individual challenges identified by the NGO applicants included the high call volume at DCF preventing them from speaking to someone as well as confusing questions on the application and not remembering one’s username, password or other pertinent information to complete the application. None of these comments are substantially different from what the library applicants said. Moreover, only one NGO applicant admitted to struggling with the technology and none said they had problems reading from the computer screen. They are both unexpected findings that contrast with my participant-observations. I recall one occasion in particular where I helped a man complete the entire application because he could not type. He subsequently agreed to participate in my research. When it came time to assessing his own proficiency with a computer keyboard and mouse he did not describe himself as being technologically challenged. This instance exemplifies the challenge of informant inconsistency.

Question 7: Can you find the paper application on the ACCESS website? The ACCESS application can be printed off of the Internet and done on paper. If you have never tried to find the paper ACCESS application before, then open a new window in your web browser to find it now. Rank below how easy it was to find the paper version.

I asked this question because the paper application had been increasingly difficult to acquire. It is supposed to be available at the one remaining DCF office in the County, at Community Partners, over the telephone or downloaded from the ACCESS website. However, at the time I asked this question, the online application appeared to be buried deep within the ACCESS website. I wanted to
see if applicants and employees would agree with me. Nearly three-quarters of all applicants found it difficult and more than a one-third of librarians stated the same. When I checked the ACCESS website in May 2012 a link to the paper application was now available on the homepage near the bottom.

**Conclusion**

These results answered a part of the first overarching research question, namely, (Q1) how do DCF officials (c) address the challenges of applicants and employees at public libraries and NGOs? The results also answered the second overarching research question in its entirety: (Q2) How do ACCESS applicants and those who assist them at public libraries and NGOs (a) articulate and (b) assess their experiences, and (c) address their challenges with the application process?

Several patterns emerged from the findings to answer these questions. The first is ACCESS has obligated library employees through an “unfunded mandate” to help lower-income people who turn to them for assistance either of their own accord or through DCF’s prompting. The second pattern from the findings is the difference between applicants’ self-reported challenges with the application process and the struggles both the employees and I observed the applicants having. Applicants’ complex life situations do not easily fit within the predefined categories of an online application. As a library employee shared with me, “People […] do not come with standardized circumstances.”

Applicants’ frustration can be seen in their twisted faces of anger waiting on the phone to speak with a DCF employee only to be disconnected, the tears
when the process of applying became too stressful, and the stories they shared of being denied and not knowing why. Nevertheless, the survey findings show that applicants are much more laudatory of the ACCESS program than employees. While the employees were substantially more critical of ACCESS, they join the applicants in agreeing e-government is better for the nation overall.

ACCESS was described as a “game” that involves certain tactics for applicants to negotiate the process and alliances between Community Partners and the DCF Community Liaison. Different material consequences arise for applicants based on their ability to overcome hurdles and the rapport of their Community Partner with the Liaison. Further, library employees not in the Partner network had comparable experiences in figuring out for themselves how best to help their patrons as employees of NGOs in the network who felt neglected by their Liaison.

Also, when research participants discuss the positive attributes of e-government and ACCESS, they do so mainly from a functional perspective (i.e., efficiency, accessibility and usability). This mirrors the utilitarian description of ACCESS among DCF leadership in the previous chapter (Cody, et al. 2008; Lange 2009). It also overlaps with the e-government researchers in the Literature Review Chapter who regularly invoke service delivery aspects of e-government, overshadowing its potential to improve citizenship or civic engagement or government transparency (Navarra and Cornford 2012). However, my data findings also revealed an affective benefit, with technology serving as a filter between long, frustrating lines at DCF offices and the social workers some
applicants find to be disrespectful. The reports reviewed in the previous chapter also concluded that the ACCESS program saves people time by not having them come to a DCF office. Though there was no mention in those reports of technology serving as a welcome buffer from some rude caseworkers.

The last overriding pattern in the data is that when I asked applicants directly about the design of information and websites, then they expressed how when it is done poorly it could influence their usability. They did not mention information design on the ACCESS website voluntarily when given the opportunity to critique their experiences. Perhaps it was because they felt the website was well designed. Observing their frustration with poorly worded questions and the absence of textboxes to type out their personal circumstances suggests otherwise. Design can have a tacit influence on our experiences, virtual or physical, and governments are using this purposefully to advance public policy (The Economist 2012).

Comparing research participants’ positive comments to their negative opinions about e-government and ACCESS, the absence of an emotive connection to government is resignified. Instead of the dearth of personal interaction being construed as protection from a prior system that was aversive, the lack now becomes problematic. This is illustrated through such descriptions of government being “uncaring,” “impersonal” and “cold.” Finally, this chapter contributes towards building a model for an anthropology of e-government by using ethnographic methods infrequently employed when evaluating e-government programs. In the following chapter, the results revealed here will be
contextualized through the various stages of the application process and by the literature on design and anthropological treatments of U.S. poverty.
CHAPTER 6: ANALYZING THE EXPERIENCES OF APPLICANTS AND EMPLOYEES USING THE POVERTY STUDIES AND DESIGN LITERATURE

Overview

Two conclusions from the previous chapter will be analyzed here: 1) DCF devolves responsibility for assisting applicants to the local level and 2) ACCESS applicants and employees at the NGOs and public libraries are consistently frustrated with the application process and critique it for being impersonal and uncaring. The inconsistency between research participants’ self-reported and observed behaviors will be addressed later in the Chapter 8. Two mutually supporting, analytical approaches will be used here. One approach employs concepts from the anthropology of U.S. poverty; the other from the field of design. Both contextualize the findings from the previous chapter through stages of the ACCESS application process. Collectively, they contribute concepts that serve as components of a model for an anthropology of e-government.

Concepts Applied from the Anthropology of U.S. Poverty

The experiences of research participants can be described in the poverty studies literature as the “dramaturgy of work” (Piven and Cloward 1993:343; Rozen 2007:40). The concept means the purposeful humiliation or stress in applying for public assistance in order to teach welfare recipients (and the librarians and NGO staffers) that any paid job is better than welfare. The idea is
associated with “rationing by inconvenience”: an approach to limit public assistance by making the procedure so onerous only those who are desperate would complete the necessary requirements (Southworth 1945). DCF’s polices can also be characterized as employing “neoliberal” techniques (Goode and Maskovsky 2001a; Harvey 2007), by transferring the responsibility for ensuring the public’s access to government services to local actors. This has left individual applicants as well as libraries and NGOs operating within a “self-service model” for welfare provisioning rather than a “caseworker model” (Cody, et al. 2008:1). Finally, while the application itself may be standardized, the way people experience it in public places is not. Their interactions with government employees (or the librarians and NGO staff who do the work for them) at the “street-level” demonstrate the subjective way policy is experienced and ultimately implemented (Lipsky 2010; Lopez 2005).

“If I Didn’t Know, Then What about Other People?”

The application process for many begins with realizing they have few options besides applying online. The paper application can be found by navigating through the ACCESS website or by requesting it through the toll free number to be mailed or at a Community Partner willing to print it out. But none of these options for acquiring the paper application are publicized by DCF through the literature available at HELP or on its website, and seldom arose during informal and formal data gathering. The entire application process is structured around an automated, electronic system, not one to accommodate an influx of paper applications. Further, DCF employees on two separate occasions admitted
to me their agency’s preference for the online system: once at a training for librarians and the second at a Community Forum for Partners.

Some applicants do not know they can use any computer connected to the Internet. Even a fellow PhD student told me how she went to a community organization to apply for Medicaid for her children only to learn she could have used her home computer. She wondered aloud to me something along the lines of “If I didn’t know, then what about other people?”

To answer her question, in part, I visited Community Partners on a list DCF provided the public. I arrived at one place on the list only to learn it was not a Partner organization. They said they send people across the street to another organization when asked about ACCESS. So I crossed the road and arrived at this second organization to learn they were not Partners either. But they had computers and a fax machine available to ACCESS applicants among others seeking public services through the Internet. Two middle-age women working the front desk at this organization empathized with the frustration of applicants. Their story, taken from my field notes, exemplifies what other NGO employees shared with me as well as my interactions with applicants during informal and formal data gathering.

I then began asking them whether anyone actually comes here asking for ACCESS help. They said “all the time,” adding that people often go from one community organization to another, being told they don’t provide help with ACCESS. Both ladies recognized that this is very frustrating for the person seeking social services so when they land on their doorstep they are often stressed and angry, taking it out on the women. However, they both understood this frustration and said that they “don’t take it personally.” They also mentioned how people “often” are waiting outside in the morning to receive help dealing with some aspect of the ACCESS program. These individuals are particularly frustrated when they learn that this organization is not an ACCESS site and that relatively no help is provided to
complete the ACCESS application process, aside from faxing documents to DCF, printing the confirmation sheet that the application was submitted successfully online and having a computer with Internet access to use.

At the least, the frustration and running around to start the application process points to a poorly designed e-government system. It does not provide an alternative option – such as applying over the phone – to assist applicants’ accessibility of the services. This leaves people who are technically and educationally challenged as well as physically and cognitively impaired with few alternatives. At the worst, ACCESS is a cocktail of the dramaturgy of work, rationing through inconvenience and disenfranchisement through devolving state responsibility to the local level.

“Designerly Ways of Knowing”

While these critical anthropological explanations may be true, they do not fully account for the varied and seemingly innocuous ways the design of the application process is challenging for research participants through a technological medium. Rather than investigating the role of technology in informants’ lives, as anthropological treatments of technology often do (Batteau 2010; Horst and Miller 2006; Miller and Slater 2000; Pfaffenberger 1988, 1992), an alternative perspective is to look at how political processes shape the design of public information and services. Doing so, I argue, offers a finer grained, analytical approach to understand research participants’ experiences through “designerly ways of knowing” (Cross 1982, 2001) – that is, thinking as a designer by using design principles or methods (Kimbell 2011b; Walters 2011) to understand what is included or left out of a technological application process and
how this can shape people’s experiences.

“Design thinking” does not necessarily politicize nor include a comprehensive approach to research (Norman 2010; Nussbaum 2011). It requires anthropology to do that. However, unlike the analytical approach of anthropology that privileges the holistic critique, design prioritizes the deliverable, in that it necessarily produces a thing, service or space. By finding weakness within a program, designers must offer viable solutions and even create and test them among users. For anthropologists, this means design can be used to strengthen an applied approach to data gathering and analysis. Three design principles will be mentioned below before resuming the analysis of the results.

**Three Key Concepts from Design**

There is a sub-field of design known as “service design” that commonly employs ethnographic methods to understand how users or potential customers interact with objects, spaces and people as they experience a service, such as medical treatment in a hospital or staying at a hotel (Brown 2009). These interactions are known a “touch points” or places where the user experiences different dimensions of a service (Kimbell 2011a:43). Anthropologists working with designers often “seek out the touch points of a situation [that offer] – the key opportunities that have been overlooked or misunderstood” (Kelley and Littman 2005:23).

Another principle of design is called the “nudge” (Lidwell, et al. 2010:170). Nudging means purposeful design to guide behavior often in predictable ways (Ariely 2008). In terms of designing information, one nudging technique involves
“choice architecture” or how options and information are presented to people (Thaler and Sunstein 2008). For example, websites are typically designed with the most pertinent information to be found at the top, including the name of the website, a search function and critical links one needs to navigate through it. Designers of websites nudge users towards information that is most commonly sought.

The third and final concept used by designers that is addressed here is called a “workaround.” Workarounds occur when an individual is trying to accomplish a task within the perimeters of the designed service, object or environment. However, when someone devises an alternative technique for task completion outside of these perimeters, then it is a workaround. This often occurs because a more efficient way was discovered or an obstacle arose and was subsequently worked around. An important assumption in using touch points, nudges and workarounds is that they are meant to improve the way people experience services, including public policies. They can, however, obfuscate or distort information, which in Chapter 7 I conclude occurs around DCF’s optional ACCESS user feedback form.

**Usability and Its Discontents**

The initial touch point with the ACCESS homepage is in bright red letters warning against imprisonment and fines for entering false information, rather than welcoming users (see Figure 6.1). The icon on the top half the screen (i.e., “My ACCESS Account”) nudges applicants to select it. Unfortunately, My ACCESS is designed for people who have already submitted their application and seek to
learn their status or for those renewing their benefits. If the homepage was
Figure 6.1: Top half of the ACCESS homepage on May 25, 2012

designed for potential rather than returning clients, then the screening option to see if someone is eligible would be presented first along with the choice to start the application process.

After DCF created the My ACCESS feature in 2008, DCF employees at the toll free number began nudging applicants towards the website for all questions with the status of their application. “They always tell you to go to My ACCESS,” said an NGO employee during an interview. While some applicants continued to receive assistance through the toll free number, DCF representatives at the toll-free number informed other clients to create a My ACCESS account and learn for themselves what is happening with their application status. It is no accident that My ACCESS is featured at the top of the homepage. The more people who use it correctly, or so the idea goes, the fewer would use the toll free number that is
flooded with calls (OPPAGA 2008). Parts of the website appear to be designed for the benefit of DCF employees rather than the applicants.

First-time applicants must find their way down the homepage to the icon labeled “Apply for Benefits.” Selecting it takes users to another screen, which requires them to choose from a list of actions, such as applying for the first time or resuming an application. The screen after that requests all applicants to create a temporary user name and password that is not their welfare identification number. Rather, it is a unique number only for applying that allows users to pause the application and return within 30 days to complete it. Once their application has been submitted, however, this username and password is no longer tied to the applicants. That is, they have to wait for a new number to be posted to them in the mail by DCF. Further, attempting to enter that username and password to create their My ACCESS account three times locked users out. As an NGO employee explained to me, applicants then had to go in person to one of the three remaining offices in the County at the time with identification to get the account unlocked. This practice has since been changed, but at the least it was poor design and at worst the dramaturgy of work.

Another hurdle for applicants during my research was the absence of spaces or textboxes where they could type their unique circumstance or explain their situation. In May 2012, I found this too had changed. As mentioned previously, I was unable to interview DCF officials about their user and Community Partner feedback system. With all its faults, DCF was able to make positive changes to the application however late in coming. Near the end of the
application there is now a textbox labeled “Comments” and an applicant has 500 characters to enter whatever she wants to communicate. Gradually, it appears DCF policy workers are making accommodations to understand people’s circumstances.

“Street-Level” E-Government

Applicants received varying levels of assistance based on where they applied, the nature of their questions and their interactions with the staff. This subjectivity extended beyond applicants to the employees themselves who reported wide variation in their rapport with the DCF Community Liaison. The employees said how their rapport shaped the degree to which they could serve their clients.

While some applicants at HELP were able to have an employee or volunteer type the application for them, I never saw this at Library B, likely due to library policy discussed below in greater detail. My visits to nearly two-dozen different Community Partners in the County revealed a range of options actually available to applicants, not just those promised by DCF. Many of these organizations were either closed or not Partners, contrary to DCF informing the public that they are in the Partner network. Whether intentional or accidental, applicants are taxed in seeking assistance at organizations that either do not offer these services or simply do not exist.

“How Far Can We Help These People?”

Soon after ACCESS launched statewide, one of the librarians, named Erkya, described how people kept showing up at her library branch asking for her
assistance. She was confused as to how they got her name and they responded that someone at the local DCF office recommended her. Even though she and her supervisor called DCF to tell them to stop, they continued to come. Soon, Eryka’s colleagues looked to her for advice and would ask, “How far can we help these people?” Years after applicants stopped seeking her out, she is uncertain how DCF identified her as point of contact. What is certain is that DCF – through an e-government program – nudged applicants to the public libraries both explicitly in this example and implicitly by the public turning there for free Internet access and some level of assistance with ACCESS.

Librarians provided varying levels of assistance to ACCESS users. The official rules are clear for those in Anora County: do not type anything on the application for anyone. Every library employee with whom I spoke reiterated this rule, which also served as a condition for my research. The rule likely resulted from a fear of litigation for wrongly entering information, though it could also be part of the unfunded mandate whereby helping applicants to this degree would monopolize librarians’ time. There are, however, degrees of interpretation and implementation of policy. This contributes to the range of assistance any particular applicant may receive from a librarian as well as an NGO employee. Some librarians confessed to me in breaking this rule to assist senior citizens or those visually impaired who implored them for assistance by saying they had nowhere else to go for help. Another librarian working in rural areas among a small community found it unconscionable not to help neighbors.

The staff at HELP also was directed during my research not to type any
information into the application. This rule, however, was not followed consistently. Similarly to the rural public librarians, friends of staff members at HELP often had their application typed for them. People who appeared elderly and physically impaired would also be helped in this way.

Workarounds in Response to Varying Levels of Assistance

The most common workaround deployed by applicants at HELP and Library B alike was to have a friend or family member complete the application for them or sitting beside them offering guidance. The physical presence of a friend or family member, even one who says little or nothing at all to the applicant, was a regular occurrence in which I too participated and observed. Applicants at HELP routinely asked me to sit near them assuming I was a volunteer or after I had introduced my research and mentioned I could assist them if needed. Sometimes they would ask me questions and other times they would not. When I was recruiting applicants at Library B this happened to a lesser extent, since library policy appeared to frown upon two or more people at one computer terminal. This included family and friends who assisted applicants. HELP did not have this policy or at least did not enforce it. However, I did sit behind several of those Library B applicants who thanked me for my presence and at times minimal contributions, such as clarifying the meaning of a couple questions.

Another workaround is paying people to do the application. An NGO employee said she heard of a local notary charging people $20 to type their application. One applicant at HELP who completed my survey admitted to doing the same. These workarounds are in response to an ideology within state
policies encouraging self-sufficiency and shifting state-level government control and expenses to the local level. Additionally, non-DCF employees helping applicants as well as applicants’ desire to have someone nearby for support – be it instructional or emotional – speaks to the critiques offered by research participants who described DCF as being “cold,” “uncaring,” and “distant.” Moreover, these workarounds cumulatively represent clear shortcomings in the design that do not accommodate for people’s unique circumstances and emotional needs.

“What Do I Do Next?”

ACCESS users commonly asked this question after submitting their application at HELP. Depending on the employees there at the time, they were told to return within ten days if DCF did not send them a letter. That way someone at HELP could advocate on their behalf to determine their status by creating a My ACCESS account or calling the toll free number. Other HELP staff would simply tell applicants DCF would contact them. Applicants at libraries who asked this question of employees received varying responses depending on the librarian’s familiarity with the program. ACCESS is one of many e-government services with which librarians help patrons, among their other responsibilities.

I asked one NGO employee, who had been assisting ACCESS applicants for more than two and half years at that point about how often they come in with a letter either on the day they had to take some action with DCF or after the fact. She responded, “All the time, and that is because, and I explain to them, most of it is computer generated or the computer has a mind of its own. The [DCF]
workers don’t even put forth the effort.” Across multiple platforms of communicating with an individual applicant – the Internet, telephone, mail – misunderstanding occurs. The routine mix up, however, in informing clients to do something on or past the deadline was questionable and predictable in that it would happen again to someone else. Over the years I spent at HELP informally and formally gathering data I observed this regularly. The same NGO employee concluded, “To me it’s designed to frustrate the client to the point that they decide that they are no longer interested.” Her words parallel the anthropological literature on the dramaturgy of work.

“Citizen-Centered” Design

If a fundamental policy objective of DCF’s leadership in regards to the ACCESS program is accessibility and usability (Cody, et al. 2008; Lange 2009), then the design approach would be to make the application and the process of applying as accommodating as possible for the public. That is, it would be “human-centered” (Cooley 1999) or “citizen-centered” (Atkinson 2006; Jaeger and Bertot 2010), designed around existing not assumed needs of the public. Designers are often guided in this aim to make things, services and spaces “usable, without modification, by as many people as possible” (Lidwell, et al. 2010:16), minimizing the need for workarounds.

Since the 1960s, if not earlier, designers have been encouraged to consider historically marginalized populations or those with “special needs” to ensure their participation in whatever experience is being designed (Norman 1990:164; Papanek 2009:110,132). That is, by thinking of those with “extreme”
challenges (Brown 2009:44) as the starting point to design can reveal new avenues for developing easier usability for the larger population. Moreover, for e-government services to uphold the democratic values espoused by the governments adopting them (ITU 2011) then the design of public services must accommodate accessibility for all members of society. In fact, U.S. federal codes within the 1998 Rehabilitation Act require this in relation to accessing public services (Jaeger 2006a).

Design done correctly is democratizing (Lausen 2007). It allows for people with various abilities and resources to engage with an object, service or physical space in their own way in order to participate in society. When this thinking is applied to policy, it synthesizes taxpayer and social citizenship (Schneider and Ingram 1997; Tunstall 2009). This is because – according to expert designer Tim Brown (2009:66-68) early in the design process there is “divergent thinking.” Ethnographic research and creative ideas allow for all possibilities of what could make an effective e-government program during divergent thinking. “Convergent thinking” follows this where considering time, money, efficiency and other constraints of program implementation provide focus. The application of design and anthropological thinking to e-government policy can be instructive in creating a more citizen-centered experience for the public.

Conclusion

I discussed two conclusions from the previous Results 1 Chapter. The first is DCF devolves responsibility for assisting applicants to the local level. The second is ACCESS users and employees at NGOs and public libraries are
frustrated with the application process and feel it can be impersonal and uncaring. In spite of some advancement to the ACCESS application, there is still much to be done to improve the experiences of applicants and employees alike at NGOs and public libraries. Any significant improvements should be made with an eye towards accommodating for the diverse needs of historically marginalized populations. Doing so is both a fundamental principle of good design (Lidwell, et al. 2010:16) and it upholds the stated policy objective of DCF to help all who are eligible (Lange 2009).

Until these changes are made the most vulnerable applicants are left with few workarounds, aside from having someone else help them with the application. Rather than a self-sufficiency model of applying for public assistance, for the participants in this research, it is a dependency model whereby they rely on others for guidance through the application process. Placing the burden of finding assistance with the applicants themselves transfers DCF’s responsibility to provide help to library and NGO employees as well as to applicants’ friends and family. Devolving policy through an unfunded mandate exacerbates variation in the user-experience at the street-level.

Some applicants were able to find the assistance they needed based on their personal agency and the structures inherent in the public space from which they were applying. If they were at a Community Partner with a knowledgeable staff that has a close relationship with the DCF Liaison, then they may receive outstanding assistance. If they went to a busy public library and needed someone to type the application for them or had numerous questions about the
application, then they were largely left to themselves as to how to workaround their challenges.

The key concepts discussed here included critiques of devolving central government services to local actors, the shortcomings of a self-sufficiency ideology that has shaped the design of the application process, the importance of human-centered design and the potential of information design to nudge human behavior. While design concepts may have provided an approach to understand the nuances of usability and ways to improve it, these concepts do not contextualize applicants’ experiences within welfare policy historically or holistically. “Design thinking” has its value (Kimbell 2011b; Walters 2011), but to understand the necessary cultural, political and economic complexity of applicants’ and employees’ experiences requires anthropological thinking. This thinking is applied to the next chapter, which critiques the data DCF gathered from its user feedback form and a questionnaire it provides to Community Partners. The next chapter also highlights how policy workers evaluate public programs. These assessment practices contribute towards a model for an anthropology of e-government.
CHAPTER 7: HOW DCF ASSESSES APPLICANTS’ EXPERIENCES AND ADDRESSES THEIR CHALLENGES

Overview

This chapter answers (Q1) How DCF officials (b) assess the experiences of applicants and employees at public libraries and NGOs and (c) address applicants’ challenges? Chapter 5 answered, in part, (Q1c) by discussing Community Partners at the street-level and how DCF’s rapport with them addresses applicants’ and employees’ challenges. Here, however, the focus will be on the Computer Partner network, which is a meso-level of analysis. This chapter also contributes towards building a model for an anthropology of e-government by demonstrating how the evaluative practices of policy workers can shape perceptions of the effectiveness of government programs.

Datasets

Two datasets gathered by DCF are used here. The first dataset is an overview of which organizations are in the Community Partner network and what they are paid, if anything, for their services. These data represent how DCF leadership addresses applicants’ challenges through a largely volunteer organizational infrastructure. Additionally, it shows how DCF assesses the needs of its Community Partners. The second dataset includes six years of monthly data – January 2006 to January 2012 – from the optional, ACCESS user,
feedback form applicants can complete after submitting their application online. This dataset is meant to show how DCF management assesses applicants' experiences with ACCESS.

**DCF: Addressing Applicants' Challenges**

DCF created the Community Partner network of nonprofit, for-profit and government institutions, including public libraries. These organizations provide computers with Internet connections along with some degree of assistance with the application. Paper applications may also be obtained at these organizations. The effort to develop the Partner network coincides with the closure of DCF offices throughout Florida (Lange 2009; Moore and Newcomer 2011).

In early February 2012, a DCF office of research sent me a spreadsheet in response to three questions I provided them: (1) How many Community Partners are there in Florida? (2) How much is each paid? (3) What type of organizations are they? As of January 2012, there were more than 3,000 Community Partners, of which 73 received a combined total of about $920,000. This amounts to about 2 percent of all Community Partners being compensated for their services at rate of less than $13,000 on average. The highest paid Partner received $35,000 a year and the lowest just $20. If the average amount paid to those 73 Partners were paid to every other organization in the network it would cost DCF more than $41 million each year.

By not paying the amount in addition to other cost reducing measures DCF reportedly “saves” $83 million annually (Lange 2009:19). Examination of these savings, however, reveals it is actually the amount of money the Florida
legislature cut from the DCF budget not money recouped or reinvested elsewhere (OPPAGA 2008:2). So it should actually read that these measures “make up for an $83 million shortfall in the budget.” To contextualize these amounts, the annual budget for the entire ACCESS program is approximately $633 million (DCF 2011b:12). An $83 million reduction in costs amounts to about 13 percent of the total budget and $41 million is about 6.5 percent of that overall budget.

The word cloud software (Steinbock 2012) below shows the different types of organizations in Florida that are Community Partners with their total number in parentheses. Medical providers and faith-based organizations are the most common type of Partner. They number about 17 percent and 10 percent respectively of all the Partners in the network. The fewest amount of organizations, representing less than half of one percent, are Partners that help migrants, refugees and immigrants.

Figure 7.1: Total number of DCF Community Partners in January 2012
Also drawing from among all of the Partners in the state, another word cloud below shows which type and how many organizations are paid:

![Word Cloud]

Figure 7.2: Total number of Community Partners in Florida receiving compensation by DCF as of January 2012

The data show that the state government is able to save tens of millions of dollars by shifting the human and financial resources to assist applicants to an already underfunded sector of Florida: public libraries and NGOs. Moreover, organizations targeting the needs of those who are homeless, migrants, refugees or immigrants can be particularly impacted since none receive any financial compensation from DCF for their Partnership. Additionally, there are 168 individual library branches in Florida that have agreed to be Community Partners. The Florida State Library in Tallahassee confirmed with me that there are 523 library branches in Florida (Personal Communication, February 3, 2012). Thus nearly one third of all libraries in the state are ACCESS Partners and none receive any DCF funding for their services. The assertions of an “unfunded mandate” among librarians are statistically true.
DCF: Assessing Employees’ Experiences

There are at least two reasons why DCF management seeks to have a large number of Community Partners on its list. The first is of course to help the public. The more locations there are, the greater availability to assist more clients. The names and contact information of these organizations go on the ACCESS website, directing applicants to the Partners in place of the few remaining DCF offices. Secondly, high membership in the Community Partner network can serve as a critical evaluative component. It demonstrates broad, local institutional support for ACCESS to both the greater public as well as state and federal authorities/funding bodies (Lange 2009:19).

DCF’s relationship with Partners is assessed annually through a paper questionnaire shown below (DCF 2011a:38):

![Image of the Community Partner questionnaire]

Figure 7.3: The Community Partner questionnaire
This questionnaire uses a Likert scale, unlike the feedback form that applicants complete online. The scale begins with 5 or “very satisfied” and ends with 1 or “very unsatisfied” as though attempting to nudge (Thaler and Sunstein 2008) respondents towards the higher end. The first question asks Partners to “rate the overall Access process” that includes the “support that you receive from DCF staff” as well as providing a written space for comments. Understanding the overall process is not assessed on applicants’ online feedback form nor is there room for written comments. Additionally, asking Partners to use a paper evaluation and requiring it to be mailed (or faxed, according to an NGO informant) is not inline with DCF’s approach to automating and digitizing its services, including the user feedback form applicants can complete online. Overall, this feedback from is much more sophisticated than the user feedback form in measuring experiences through an open-ended question and using a Likert scale, yet technologically arcane when compared to an online survey. The fact that it is on paper and administered annually implies that digital record keeping is not a priority for this evaluation nor is ongoing feedback to find specific areas to improve the experiences of Partners and their clients. Unfortunately, I was unable to uncover the results of this survey.

**DCF: Assessing Applicants’ Experiences**

The former Administrator of the ACCESS program, Jennifer Lange (2009:19), wrote, "By all accounts, ACCESS is a success […] 97 percent of applicants surveyed said they would do it again.” Lange implied that applicants are almost unanimously satisfied with ACCESS. So how is this user feedback
form presented to applicants and what exactly is it? Floridians who submit ACCESS online are taken to a new screen or web page. There they are requested to provide a telephone number and other contact information to be reached that same day before 5pm should a DCF employee choose to do so. There are additional questions on this screen as well. Only by scrolling down to the end does one see information about an optional survey on the next screen. If an applicant chooses to complete the survey, advancing to the subsequent screen, then they will see the following:

![ACCESS Online Survey](image)

Figure 7.4: The ACCESS user feedback survey

Look closely at the last question, “Would you use this web application again?” There are only two choices of “yes” or “no.” What sort of choice is this compared to obtaining food, health care and for pregnant mothers emergency cash assistance? It appears to be a poor measure of assessing user satisfaction. Yet, this statistic communicates that ACCESS is a successful program from the
perspective of its users. Of the nine questions asked on the ACCESS evaluation, none allow respondents to type what they like or don’t like about the experience.

DCF tends to represent the data from this evaluation using pie charts and monthly totals (Cody, et al. 2008; Lange 2009). If I were to use a pie chart to summarize the total responses about whether applicants would use the application again, the data from January 2006-January 2012 would look clear:

![Pie chart](image)

Figure 7.5: Pie chart showing applicants’ aggregated responses to the ACCESS survey question, “Would you use this web application again?”

The results are exceedingly positive, considering in that six-year timeframe an average of more than 37,000 people a month said “Yes,” 1,000 “No,” and 6,000 left the question blank. DCF never reported the number of people who left questions blank (Cody, et al. 2008; Lange 2009). I was unable to obtain the data of how many people applied each month during the six years. However, the monthly average number of households receiving SNAP benefits during that time exceeded one million.

There are many alternative ways of representing these data. One of them was created below. It captures applicants’ total responses each month. Rather
than lumping all six years together it shows time series data spread over the years.

Figure 7.6: Time series data showing applicants’ aggregated responses to the ACCESS survey question, “Would you use this web application again?”

In this graphic, we see that there has been a steep decline in satisfaction since the last quarter of 2010 for reasons that are not clear. Nor is it certain how DCF is responding to this change.

The findings of four more questions from the optional ACCESS survey are presented below using similar pie charts as DCF that omit blank responses. The results aggregate monthly totals from January 2006 to January 2012 based on the following questions:

1) Please rate your experience with our screens: easy, fair, or difficult?

2) Did you need help using the web application?

3) If you needed help, was help available?

4) If you received the help, where did you get the help?
Figure 7.7: Pie chart showing applicants’ aggregated responses to the ACCESS survey question, “Please rate your experience with our screens: easy, fair, or difficult?”

On average each month, nearly 28,000 said “Easy,” 15,000 “Fair,” 2,000 “Difficult” and 800 left the question blank.

Figure 7.8: Pie chart showing applicants’ aggregated responses to the ACCESS survey question, “Did you need help using the web application?”

On average each month, more than 37,000 people said “No,” 8,000 “Yes,” and 800 left the question blank.
Figure 7.9: Pie chart showing applicants’ aggregated responses to the ACCESS survey question, “If you needed help, was help available?”

Again using monthly averages, more than 18,000 people said “Yes,” 8,000 “No,” and 18,000 left the question blank. It is unclear why so many did not answer the question. Perhaps because they answered the previous question “no” when asked whether or not they needed help. The absence of reporting the number of people who left this question blank, however, illustrates how the presentation of evaluative data can shape the way information about the success or failure of a government program is interpreted by the public and program officials.

Figure 7.10: Pie chart showing applicants’ aggregated responses to the ACCESS survey question, “If you received help, where did you get the help?”
Monthly averages reveal more than 8,000 people used only the help screen, just under 6,000 had personal assistance alone, greater than 2,000 required both the help screen and personal assistance, and slightly less than 3,000 left the question blank. What if a line graph comparing the applicants’ responses to the above questions was used in place of pie charts?

![Figure 7.11: Time series data of the number of applicants who said that (1) no help was available, (2) they received personal assistance, (3) they needed help and (4) the application was a difficult experience from January 2006 to January 2012.](image)

While the pie charts characterize applicants’ usability of ACCESS as relatively easy or trouble free the figure above is puzzling. If the DCF survey is an accurate measure, then the number of people who received assistance from someone is greater than those who said that they required it. So people are receiving help even though they did not request it? Also, what explains the seemingly static number of people who preferred to describe the ACCESS experience as “difficult” over six years? The number of individual SNAP recipients in Florida increased from nearly 1.3 million to 3.3 million between January 2006 to January
2012 (DCF 2012c). Is it not likely that as more people apply for the first time there would be an increase in the number of those who found the application difficult? It is unclear why exactly this number has remained the same and why it is so far below the number of applicants who said they needed help or found that no help was available? As my own ethnographic survey data results showed some people can be reticent about expressing they have difficulties interacting with computer technology. The larger question here, however, is whether or not any of these data from DCF can be generalized to the larger ACCESS population.

Generalizing Results from the DCF ACCESS User Feedback Survey

DCF does not collect any demographic information from those who complete the user feedback form. As the form itself shows, no question asks about applicants’ technological and English proficiency (i.e., usability questions) and whether they are applying from home or a Community Partner (i.e., accessibility questions and also usability related since people may go to a Partner for application specific questions even if they can type and read). The absence of these data means DCF does not know whether or not it has a representative sample of the ACCESS user population to generalize their survey findings. Additionally, applicants using paper are not given the option to complete the online survey.

Beyond the problematic questions on the user feedback form and the absence of a statistically representative sample, my participant-observations of the user experience contradict the findings from the feedback from. To begin
with, applicants must complete a series of requirements after submitting their application online. These requirements are not accounted for in the feedback form. For example, applicants have to create a My ACCESS account to renew their benefits and check the status of their application. Applicants receive a letter in the mail instructing them about what they needed to do next. This often involves photocopying and faxing and may even require a phone interview. The complications that arise when attempting to complete these tasks are not as straightforward as they may appear.

In addition, Community Partners and public library employees are not encouraged by DCF to have their patrons complete the feedback form, or if they are then those efforts are ineffective. I never observed any employee ask an applicant about completing it. In the end, this form is not helpful in illuminating how Floridians experience the entire application process. I believe my ethnographic findings provide an alternative and more nuanced understanding of the programs’ usability and accessibility among applicants.

**Conclusion**

This chapter focused on (Q1) how DCF officials (b) assess the experiences of applicants and employees at public libraries and NGOs and (c) address the challenges of applicants. Three notable themes emerged from the results to answer these questions. The first dealt with the unfunded mandate that led to the creation of the Partner network in which about one-third of all public libraries in the state participate. The remaining two-thirds are ostensibly in the network, since they cannot turn away people needing to use their resources for
ACCESS. Further, the absence of DCF payments to any homeless shelter or organization whose target population is non-native English speakers suggests, in part, which populations the state considers are least deserving of funding to ensure their participation in the ACCESS program. Devolving DCF responsibility to local actors has been addressed already in the Analysis 1 Chapter, so it will not be revisited in the subsequent Analysis 2 Chapter. The second and third themes to emerge here, however, will be discussed.

The second theme to arise from the data is the official DCF evaluation of the user-experience is opaque and limited. This is due to the way the questions are asked, the emphasis of the questions on the initial application experience and not the entire process, and the inconclusiveness of the findings. The complex experiences of applicants at NGOs and public libraries appear to be largely unreported in the current format of the evaluation.

The third theme is the discrepancy between applicants’ self-reported experiences. As the timeline series data demonstrated, applicants’ self-reports are inconsistent with what would be expected. For example, the number of people who received assistance from someone is greater than those who said that they required it. Informant inconsistency has been analyzed in the anthropological literature (Bernard, et al. 1984; Bernard, et al. 1986; McNabb 1990), but not within the e-government literature. The benefits of this analysis highlight the importance of triangulating research findings, which is part of a model for an anthropology of e-government detailed in Chapter 9. Another
element of the model, discussed here, is how the evaluative practices of policy workers can influence perceptions of government program effectiveness.
CHAPTER 8: ANALYZING DCF’S EVALUATIVE PRACTICES USING THE POLICY STUDIES AND DESIGN LITERATURE

Overview

Two of the conclusions from the previous chapter will be discussed here. The first is that DCF’s evaluative practices of ACCESS are problematic. A “designerly” perspective as well as concepts from the anthropology of policy will analyze those practices. The second conclusion is that there is a discrepancy between research participants’ self-reported and observed behavior. It is a finding that also emerged in Chapter 5 and will be analyzed now based on the anthropological research on informant inconsistency. Key concepts used below to analyze the data will inform a model for an anthropology of e-government.

Privileging an Efficient Program ahead of an Effective One

No one at DCF agreed to be interviewed about their evaluative practices of the ACCESS program. As a result, my understanding of these practices is informed by (1) the datasets it made available to me, (2) the manner in which it presents these data to the public that was reviewed in the Background Chapter (Cody, et al. 2008; Lange 2009), and (3) the instruments they use to evaluate the program (i.e., the online user feedback form and the paper questionnaire provided to Community Partners). Efficiency, accessibility and usability were the reasons DCF management offered for why they created ACCESS in the first
place (Cody, et al. 2008; Lange 2009). Efficiency, however, has been the dominant theme to arise from research participants when describing why DCF created ACCESS, why e-government is better for the nation overall and what they like about the program. “Efficiency” here means being productive within limited time and financial constraints. The applicants and employees at NGOs and public libraries were in less agreement about whether or not ACCESS was effective, that is, to ensure Floridians’ accessibility and usability of the application process. There are at least two explanations for how and why DCF privileges the evaluation of program efficiency ahead of its effectiveness. These explanations may co-occur rather than be mutually exclusive.

DCF’s Constraints

The first has to do with the existing constraints on DCF employees. "[P]olicy workers are often forced to decide what is of greatest value: activities that promote the systematic integration of research into policy decisions and require a significant investment of human and financial resource, or appearing to be a responsible manager of funds” (Williams 2010:196). I argue that participant-observation and think alouds during the application process would be effective evaluative instruments to discern the continuum of ACCESS usability challenges. Doing so would also uncover ways to improve how librarians and NGO staffers assist applicants. Participant-observation, however, may prove challenging within the political, financial and time constraints of DCF management. Anthropologist Walter Goldschmidt (1986:4) noted that while colleagues within the discipline provide valuable ways of studying policy, there remains “serious and difficult
tasks of translating their deep understanding into the workaday realities of [public policy] decision making and the crossfire that goes with such a role." This may be true, but there are still ways of approximating a closer balance in measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of public programs. Suggestions will be offered in Chapter 10.

ACCESS Evaluations are Political

The second explanation for why DCF appears to privilege the efficiency of ACCESS ahead of its effectiveness is because – as anthropological analysis of policy has demonstrated – policy evaluations are not neutral but rather political (Hyatt 2011; Shore 2008; Strathern 2000). They are deployed for purposes to advance both policy objectives and the ideological aims that undergird them. The policy objective for DCF leadership is to maintain the legitimacy of its e-government practices in which ACCESS is designed and implemented. The ideology is that government is less about providing a social safety net for the population and more about incentivizing the public’s self-sufficiency and productivity through work (Morgen and Gonzales 2008).

A “designerly” perspective (Cross 2001) of the ACCESS program makes clear the political nature of evaluations. For example, the placement of the user feedback evaluation in the application process is buried at the bottom of the screen after people submit their initial application. While offering applicants the opportunity to complete an evaluation at this stage is a good idea, it should be made more apparent to users. It currently appears as an afterthought rather than an integral part of the application process. Besides making the evaluation more
prominent and known to users, requesting them to complete an evaluation after creating their My ACCESS account later in the application process would provide greater insight into a variety of their experiences.

Another questionable practice occurring on the user feedback form is that none of the questions are meant to determine degrees of usability, which a Likert scale would unearth. This absence is peculiar since the Community Partner questionnaire to evaluate the program contains a Likert scale. So it is not as though this measurement technique is not currently practiced by DCF. Further, the Community Partner questionnaire asks about the “overall ACCESS experience” and for suggestions “to improve the process.” None of these considerations exist on the user feedback form to invite a similar critique of the effectiveness of the program.

Additionally, using a paper evaluation for the Partner questionnaire and requiring it to be mailed (or faxed, according to an NGO informant) is not in line with DCF’s approach to automating and digitizing its program, including the user feedback form. Social scientist Sherry Turkle, who analyzes human-computer interactions, describes "a new dynamic [of technological archiving]: when you depend on the computer to remember the past, you focus on whatever past is kept on the computer. And then you learn to favor whatever past is easiest to find" (Turkle 2011:301). Why is it that DCF appears to embrace technology and electronic data gathering except for this evaluation? As Turkle alluded to, what does it mean not to have a digital record that can be accessed, quantified and easily shared? How does a paper evaluation influence DCF’s ability to offer
Community Partner feedback to the public as well as state and federal authorities?

The last example of the political nature of DCF evaluative practices is the way data from the user feedback form is presented. That is, grouping time series data together in pie charts rather than through a graph, does not show how differences fluctuate over time. This technique is evidenced in reports by both the former program director of ACCESS, Jennifer Lange (2009), as well as research produced by private consultants with data provided by DCF (Cody, et al. 2008). Near identical pie charts in both of these reports convey large approval for the program rather than the nuances of opinion over time. Teasing out the aggregated data of pie charts revealed contradictory opinions from access users. For example, the number of people who received assistance from someone is greater than those who said that they required help. It was also curious that the number of people who described the ACCESS experience as “difficult” has remained relatively constant over the past six years when the number of individual SNAP recipients in Florida increased by about two million people during that time (DCF 2012c). The inconsistency of self-reported data is pertinent to this research both because anthropologists have researched and debated it and also because there is little discussion about it in the e-government literature.

Informant Consistency

The reasons for inconsistent self-reports of experiences are varied and may include suspicion of outsiders or social scientists asking personal questions; uncertainty of how the reported information could be used as well as faulty
memories (Aunger 1995; Bernard, et al. 1982). How then can one ultimately determine the veracity of what people report without observing their behavior? Anthropologists who have systematically studied informant consistency found that the more often an informant reportedly does something, the greater their consistency in recollecting past events (Freeman, et al. 1987; McNabb 1990). More generally, Bernard et al. (1984:503) provided an extensive list of studies assessing how people respond to researchers’ questions and revealed “on average, about half of what informants report is probably incorrect in some way.” Freeman et al. (1987) tested that assumption, however, and had better results of informant inconsistency. In essence, the jury is still out on both the pervasiveness of informants’ ability to recall experiences consistently and why this phenomenon occurs in the first place. I speculate on the latter by drawing on the work of sociologist Erving Goffman.

Goffman examined the “presentation of self in everyday life” (Goffman 1959) and in later years when reflecting upon the totality of his work he described his efforts as the analysis of “interaction order” (Goffman 1983). The thrust of these ideas is that when two or more people are within a certain proximity they assume behaviors based on the context of where and under what conditions they interact and the ways in which they perceive one another and themselves, among other factors. While individuals have their own reasons for presenting

10 The concept “informant accuracy” is often used in the anthropological literature, but some readers may understand this phrase to mean that informants are intentionally deceiving researchers. “Informant inconsistency” is used here instead to mitigate an implication of deception and focus on the incongruity between observed and self-reported data.
themselves in certain ways, for Goffman, embarrassment was a powerful reason for why we behave the way we do (Schudson 1984). Though having our “vulnerabilities” exposed or taken from us is one side of understanding embarrassment, people also share these vulnerabilities willingly, enabling embarrassment to be a “resource” for social cohesion between people (Goffman 1983:4).

Goffman’s ideas are applicable to my research because low-income individuals seeking public assistance with food and healthcare have a well-documented history of expressing shame and feeling stigmatized as being ignorant, lazy and undeserving of aid. The intersection of poverty and stigma includes single mothers, members of non-Anglo American populations, and men who appear to be able-bodied and capable of employment, among others groups of people (Gordon 1994; Hancock 2004; Mullings 1987; Rozen 2007). Each of these groups of people participated in my research.

I could have embarrassed or exposed the vulnerabilities of ACCESS applicants by having them admit their educational and technological challenges, particularly in a society where language and computer literacy is widespread. Moreover, there was no social imperative for ACCESS applicants to share their vulnerabilities with me. We would not likely meet again so any attempt at affiliative behavior would not likely produce the desired outcome, and potentially exposing them to embarrassment would not have an immediate positive impact on their or my own life. Conversely, admitting illiteracy or problems with using an online application may precipitate feelings of shame or inadequacy.
These speculations as to why informant inaccuracy occurred in my work should not belie the very real limitations in the assumptions about e-government survey research and its prevalence as the tool of choice in e-government evaluation. Surveys can be effective and scientifically robust research instruments, and using them in conjunction with other methods or to be ethnographically informed in their design can help account for informant inconsistency in self-reported data. Ultimately, I argue triangulation of the experiences of applicants and employees at libraries and NGOs with the ACCESS program afforded a more holistic approach to understanding issues of usability and accessibility.

**Conclusion**

Key ideas used here that will advance a model of an anthropology of e-government include the importance of triangulating data through ethnographic methods, evaluative instruments that provide balanced attention to program efficiency and effectiveness, the placement of these instruments later in the application process, and an understanding of evaluations as political instruments with ideological orientations. This ideological component of the ACCESS evaluation will be more fully developed in the following chapter in addition to all of the elements of the model discussed to this point.
CHAPTER 9: A MODEL FOR ADVANCING
AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF E-GOVERNMENT

Overview
This chapter draws on concepts from earlier chapters that articulate with one another to outline a model for an anthropology of e-government. The model is meant as a guide or heuristic to facilitate future analysis of e-government policy and practices. No claim is made of its completeness.

The Anthropological Literature
The first component of the model from the anthropological literature is the critique of the “personal responsibility” narrative, which is a popular theme among policy makers and the broader American public (Hyatt 2001). This narrative argues that a supposed lack of self-sufficiency largely explains individual poverty (Morgen and Gonzales 2008; US Congress 1996) and the inability to complete the welfare application process successfully (Susser and Kreniske 1987). DCF management’s description of the ACCESS program being a “self-directed” application process discussed in Chapter 3 embodies this narrative (Cody, et al. 2008; Lange 2009).

Anthropologists do not dismiss the importance of personal responsibility. Rather the anthropological critique of the welfare application process is that the explanation of personal responsibility rarely accompanies a balanced
consideration of the socioeconomic, educational and political structures in which applicants apply (Goode 2010). Further, welfare applicants’ experiences are subjective and occur through their interactions with street-level policy workers (Kingfisher 1998; Lipsky 2010). Responsibility for successfully navigating the application process is shaped by structures. In the case of ACCESS, this includes public librarians and NGO staffers as well as accessible and usable technology. Finally, the design of some welfare application processes have a documented history of being intentionally degrading and frustrating (O’Connor 2001; Southworth 1945), disenfranchising clients from seeking assistance (Piven 2001; Soss, et al. 2011). All the foregoing critiques contribute to the proposed model by emphasizing structural and subjective considerations that must be accounted for in the lives of e-government welfare users, particularly those who rely on public computer terminals to access social services.

Analyzing structural constraints has long been a part of anthropological analysis of U.S. poverty and the experiences of welfare recipients (Bourgois 1998; Stack 1997; Valentine 1968). Anthropologists have used the concepts “structural violence” (Farmer 2003) and “structural vulnerability” (Holmes 2011) to communicate the unapparent, structural causes of sickness to medical practitioners outside of anthropology. The idea of “structural vulnerability” as a cross-disciplinary, consciousness-raising (Freire 2000) tool is part of the proposed model for an anthropology of e-government. Structural vulnerability calls attention to the macro-level forces shaping the experiences of ACCESS and other e-government users, such as political and economic ideologies embedded
within public policies, as well as micro-level structures in the design of government websites.

**Macro-Level Structures: Neoliberal Practices and Techniques**

Devolving central government responsibility to local actors is associated with anthropological critiques of neoliberal ideologies (De Vita 1999; Fording, et al. 2007; Kingfisher 2007). A hallmark of U.S. e-government services (Jaeger and Bertot 2011), including ACCESS, is the transfer of federal and state responsibilities for ensuring the public’s access and use of these services to libraries, NGOs and individual citizens themselves. Librarians and NGO staffers often shared with me how their efforts to help applicants arose from an unfunded mandate, which is included within the proposed model.

Anthropologists within U.S. poverty studies are typically critical of two, prominent, intertwined ideologies that exist within neoliberal practices: one is economic-centric and the other politically-focused (Ruben and Maskovsky 2008; Wacquant 2011). It is an analytical convenience to separate the economic and political as neither strand functions independently of the other. Critics of the economic-centric view describe it as an ideology that “seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey 2007:4) or “market fundamentalism” (Somers and Block 2005:264). From this perspective, neoliberal ideology and public policy can promote materialism and consumerism in aspects of life not historically commoditized. For example, how people experience citizenship can be viewed and experienced as a financial transaction. Citizens are now treated as customers who pay for a service from a government agency.
looked upon as a business service provider (Goode and Maskovsky 2001b; Robotham 2009).

I call this “taxpayer citizenship” in the model. Describing citizens as “taxpayers” is commonplace among federal (US Congress 2012b; USDA 2010) and state officials (DCF 2011c) as well as the popular media (NPR 2012; Washington Post Editorial 2008) and the public administration literature (Kettl 2002). There is value in viewing citizens as taxpayers for whom public officials should spend tax dollars wisely, transparently and democratically. The popular discourse, however, is largely silent about the necessary social and moral obligation of government towards its citizenry. This obligation is known as “social citizenship” (Fraser and Gordon 1992, 1994) with antecedents in political philosophy (Curtis 1981), this idea is well established in the poverty studies literature (Hyatt 2011; Morgen and Maskovsky 2003). I use social citizenship to prioritize government’s moral obligation to the citizenry and its role to foster civic engagement beyond the function of providing services to the public.

This is not to say that one cannot maintain multiple views of citizenship or occupy different spaces within it or that these variations of citizenship are necessarily mutually exclusive. Rather, I found dominant themes in the way research participants discussed e-government and ACCESS that corresponded with broader ideologies in society about public policy and those living in poverty. For example, lower-income populations on welfare are viewed as a lesser type of citizen from the perspective of taxpayer citizenship. This is because they are not seen as “productive” members who have taxable income through work. As
political scientist Suzanne Mettler (2010:803) found in terms of public awareness of the federal government’s redistributive policies: “ordinary citizens […] have little awareness” how they benefit personally from these policies, such as from tax breaks, and view with disdain those receiving public assistance. Social citizenship, however, views lower-income populations as members of society exposed to structural vulnerabilities that require effective social policies in addition to personal agency to mitigate those vulnerabilities in an attempt to overcome their poverty (Morgen, et al. 2010).

I argue the ideology of taxpayer citizenship contributes to the commoditization of public services through privatization and unfunded mandates. More importantly in the context of my research, the ideology also helps to explain the pervasiveness of evaluative practices of government programs to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent “appropriately” in the eyes of policy workers. Auditing or the evaluation of government programs is an analytical bridge I use to connect the economic- and political-centric ideologies associated with neoliberal policies.

Anthropological analyses of welfare policies often examine the political-economic-cultural assemblage of ideologies of policy workers in social service programs, and may scrutinize their evaluative practices as well (Morgen, et al. 2010; Mulligan 2010; Riemer 2001). Focusing on the capacity of evaluation, however, to shape program design, implementation and people’s experiences on welfare can be aided by the anthropological concept of “audit culture” (Strathern 2000). This requires analyzing normative evaluative practices to discern not only their ideological aims, but also how they can shape the efficiency and
effectiveness of a government program. Analysis from this perspective can unearth the core of policy workers’ political objectives (Scherz 2011).

Evaluation as a Political “Technology”

The idea of “audit culture” is shaped by Foucault’s discussion of “technologies,” which he defined as knowledge and power used for political purposes, such as maintaining statistics about the population (Foucault, et al. 1988; Rabinow 1984:17). “[S]tatistics occupy a place of authority […] they are technologies of truth production” (Urla 1993:819). Philosopher Hubert Dreyfus and anthropologist Paul Rabinow analyzed Foucault’s work (Shore and Wright 2000:61) by discussing how “political technologies advance by taking what is essentially a political problem, removing it from the realm of political discourse, and recasting it in the neutral language of science. Once this is accomplished the problems have become technical ones for specialists to debate” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:196).

Following these critiques of statistics and evaluations used for political aims, the proposed model questions the “rational” or “objective” or “neutral” way in which e-government is evaluated (Bekkers and Homburg 2007). Admittedly, my analysis of the DCF audit culture is incomplete. I was not allowed to interview DCF employees and was unable to conduct participant-observation with any depth on their premises. My conclusions, however, are based on publications produced by DCF leadership or involving their input (Cody, et al. 2008; DCF 2007, 2011b; Lange 2009), the datasets they shared with me based on the ACCESS user feedback form, analysis of the design of this form and the
Community Partner questionnaire as well as interviews, think alouds and participant-observation of the users’ experiences with DCF evaluations. Collectively, these data revealed that DCF’s evaluative practices of ACCESS are more closely aligned with its objective of maintaining an efficient rather than an effective program. DCF ACCESS program assessments do not balance serving the greatest number of people, within its resource constraints, with the accessibility and usability of the program by all who may be eligible.

The two contributions audit culture makes towards the proposed model is first recognizing that the pressure to have exemplary evaluations can shape how public programs are designed, maintained and experienced by citizens (Shore 2008). Secondly, evaluations can advance political and ideological aims, documented previously within Florida’s unemployment agency (Soss, et al. 2011) as well as other e-government programs (Bannister 2007; Vintar and Nograšek 2010). ACCESS, I argue, is no different. While critiques of audit culture have not made significant inroads on the poverty studies literature, a change has occurred relatively recently in the way anthropologists critique neoliberalism.

The Evolving Critiques of Neoliberal Policies

Some U.S. poverty scholars within anthropology (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008) have found the “totalizing reach” of the term “neoliberalism” problematic (Allison and Piot 2011:5). They have also called for alternative conceptions of the way people experience neoliberal policies (Lyon-Callo 2008). One response has included emphasizing a political ideology they see as the new “organizing logic” of domestic U.S. policies. They describe it as an ideology
concerned principally with “law-and-order” (Maskovsky and Cunningham 2009:192). To be sure, “the overarching tropes of consumerism and markets that characterized neo-liberalism have certainly not disappeared from the social landscape, they have lodged themselves in a new assemblage” (Hyatt 2011:120). Hyatt, Maskovsky and Cunningham have identified a national security imperative at the core of public policies affecting lower-income, U.S. populations; the nature of my research has led me to other conclusions.

As stated previously, I found among my research participants a conception of citizenship shared in the broader American public; defined through being a taxpayer. I concluded that this understanding of citizenship is characterized by a service- or commercial-relationship between citizens and government, which I argue is shaped by the evaluative practices of e-government program efficiency. I also found an important role of Internet, computer and mobile technologies in advancing the economic and political ideologies of taxpayer citizenship through e-governance. A technological aspect is largely missing from the anthropological critique of U.S. welfare programs, and an analysis of e-government is also lacking.

**The Design Literature**

The design literature helped me to develop a more nuanced understanding of the structural vulnerabilities of online welfare users by considering the interface of the ACCESS website as a structure. These sorts of structures are not at the forefront of anthropological analyses of the welfare application process, and yet they lend themselves to discerning gradations in
technological usability. Examples included information design or how the questions on evaluative instruments can privilege measuring the efficiency rather than the effectiveness of a program, and also focusing on the physical and cognitive impairments of applicants themselves as ways to improve usability overall (Bertot and Jaeger 2006; Lidwell, et al. 2010).

Anthropology and design complement each other through “human-centered design” (Brown 2009). This means considering how “special people” (Norman 1990:161) or those with the most challenges in accessing and using public services are not nudged out of the application and evaluation process through problematic design. While anthropologists have long advocated for the inclusion of historically marginalized populations within society (Tax 1975; Wolf 1969), from a designer’s perspective this necessitates outcomes to improve accessibility and usability (Bichard and Gheerawo 2011; Papanec 2009). Design and anthropology together can also increase the breadth of analysis of the structural vulnerabilities of e-government users. Whereas anthropologists uncover the myriad socioeconomic and political structures experienced by e-government users, designers pinpoint shortcomings in the information architecture of a website.

The design literature provides anthropology a methodology and a “designerly” worldview to the proposed model; anthropology offers theoretical, political and ideological contributions. Ethnographic techniques and triangulating data findings are important to both anthropologists and designers. As my research demonstrated, there can be widespread inconsistencies in self-reported
data, requiring multiple strategies to collect and compare data among research participants. The anthropological literature on informant consistency speaks to the importance of triangulation (Bernard, et al. 1984; McNabb 1990). The design literature also speaks to the inconsistency between what users say and do (Tullis and Albert 2008). Designers in this vein often invoke a motto attributed to automobile industrialist Henry Ford, “If I had asked my customers what they wanted, they would have said, ‘a faster horse’” (Delcore 2009). The approach to design and anthropological research offered here can be particularly valuable to understanding e-government evaluation that currently relies heavily on Internet-based surveys (ACSI 2012; ForeSee 2012), and could benefit from interviews, thinkalouds and participant-observation.

**The E-Government Literature**

E-government research lacks theoretical anchors (Hardy and Williams 2011) due, in part, to researchers in this field coming from different disciplines in the information, engineering and social sciences. There is, however, positivistic-assumptions in the methodologies used by e-government researchers (Scholl 2011). A typical research approach is to frame evaluation as a politically neutral (Andersen, et al. 2010; GAO 2011), electronic survey-based instrument (Osman, et al. 2011; Wood, et al. 2008) that objectively (ForeSee 2012; Liu, et al. 2010; UN 2012) assesses different dimensions of a program. My proposed model means to advance a view articulated less frequently in the e-government research that e-government programs and the measures used to assess them are not neutral tools (Fountain 2008; Sefyrin and Mörtberg 2009), devoid of
political (Jensen 2010; Lopez 2005; Wong and Welch 2004) or ideological aims (Bekkers and Homburg 2007; Mulligan 2010). One reason, I argued, for the absence of analyzing ideological objectives in e-government programs is because of the conceptual difference between e-governance and e-government.

Analysis of the e-governance literature showed that ideologies are discussed as being embedded within policy, and to a lesser extent the society’s culture from which these ideologies emerge (Chadwick and May 2003; Navarra and Cornford 2012). However, considering the influence of these ideologies within the analysis of individual e-government programs is sporadic at best and absent at worst (Yildiz 2007). Further, these ideologies create evaluative rituals that privilege the efficiency of public programs ahead of effectiveness (Neave 1988; OPPAGA 2008). I argue that the distinction between e-government and e-governance as currently expressed in the literature, obfuscates the ideological objectives of e-government programs and the assessment instruments they produce. These are all intended contributions of my model to the e-government literature.

Additional contributions include using the concept “structural vulnerability” (Holmes 2011) to unearth the breadth of constraints facing e-government users, particularly historically marginalized populations. To be sure, there is a cadre of researchers in e-government who advocate for these groups of people by calling for “citizen-centered” public programs (Atkinson 2006; Jaeger and Bertot 2010; Morgeson and Mithas 2009). They recognize the devolution of federal and state government to public libraries and the unfunded mandates accompanying it
(Gibson, et al. 2009; Jaeger and Bertot 2011). Their arguments essentially advocate for e-government’s ability to advance social citizenship or democratic participation. What they do less frequently, however, is involve specific design techniques or concepts as areas for e-government analysis and program improvement. A goal of the model is to make the discourse and practice of design more approachable and normative when analyzing the experiences of historically marginalized populations with e-government.

Finally, ethnographic data gathering is not widely conducted within e-government research (Scholl 2011). Its value to the model as a means to triangulate data findings is important and the following chapter will elaborate further on methodological recommendations. Below is a table of all the elements discussed here providing a model for analyzing e-government anthropologically. The right-hand column in the table lists authors who have influenced my ideas in the construction of the model. The table also serves as a summary of this chapter.
Table 9.1: A model for analyzing e-government anthropologically

| Citizenship: There is a political-economic-technological-cultural assemblage of ideologies within the design of e-government programs. These ideologies are shared in society to varying degrees. One ideological assemblage produces a citizen-government relationship called here "taxpayer citizenship." It is defined by a fiduciary obligation of government, privileging the efficient management of taxpayer money and a functional understanding of government. Alternatively, "social citizenship" views government as having a moral obligation towards the public, prioritizing the effectiveness of e-government programs to ensure accessibility and usability. Social citizenship prioritizes civic engagement and democratic practices. Taxpayer and social citizenship are two of the multiple conceptions of citizenship that can coexist though each often represents competing political agendas. | (Chadwick and May 2003; Curtis 1981; Fraser and Gordon 1992; Gordon 1994; Hyatt 2011; Marshall 1950; Morgen and Gonzales 2008; Morgen and Maskovsky 2003; Navarra and Cornford 2012; Shore and Wright 1997; Soss 1999; Thomas 2012; US Congress 2012b; Wedel, et al. 2005) |
| Unfunded Mandate: E-government can transfer the accountability of guaranteeing the accessibility and usability of public services from central government to local actors, who can serve as de facto extensions of government agencies. Public librarians, NGO employees and individual citizens may assume greater responsibilities for helping each other and themselves to participate in society due to this transfer. Devolution does not require remuneration and personnel support to local actors, which can constrain these actors' capacity to meet their primary obligations while also assisting with e-government services. | (Fording, et al. 2007; Gibson, et al. 2009; Hyatt 2001; Jaeger and Bertot 2011; Kingfisher 2007; Lyon-Callo 2008; Morgen 2001; Soss, et al. 2011) |
| Personal Responsibility: E-government programs can be largely "self-directed." The idea of self-sufficiency has a long history within U.S. culture. It also represents different sides of taxpayer and social citizenship. From the taxpayer citizenship view, self-reliance means less government involvement and oversight. This accords with a privileging of an efficient government whose services and information for many are accessible and usable. From the social citizenship perspective, self-sufficiency does not mean government should abdicate the democratic value that all, not just most, members of society have a right to access and use public services. In this case, program effectiveness is prioritized. The removal of in-person assistance by a public employee can lead some citizens to feel government is unsympathetic and distant. | (Bertot and Jaeger 2006; GAO 2010; Graham and Levesque 2008; Hathaway and Kuzin 2007; Jaeger 2006a; Kingfisher 1998; Mead 1986; Moore and Newcomer 2011; Murray 2005; Rozen 2007; State of Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation 2011; US Congress 1996; Watts and Astone 1997) |
| Evaluation: The audit culture of policy workers can incentivize efficiency rather than the effectiveness of e-government programs in accordance with political aims and cultural beliefs of citizenship. Assuring the program is accessible and usable by all who are eligible may be secondary to the goal of the program to save money. As a result, e-government evaluations are not neutral and objective, but are rather deployed strategically to advance ideologies through policy. | (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982; Foucault 1979, 1982; Neave 1988, 1998; Power 1997; Rabinow 1984; Shore 2008; Strathern 2000) |
| Design: Design principles can help with understanding what is included or left out of a technological application process and how it can shape the e-government user experience. Three design principles included here are (1) "touch points" or places of contact between e-government users and the e-government process, (2) "nudges" or the manner in which information and options are presented to users, guiding their behavior often in predictable ways, and (3) “workarounds” or techniques for task completion outside of the designed perimeters of the e-government application process. Moreover, human-centered design can be a starting point for creating, evaluating and maintaining e-government programs. The effort is meant to improve the participation of historically marginalized populations by designing around the most vulnerable in society, including those using public computers. | (Cooley 1999; Delcore 2009; Jacobson 1999; Johnson and Goldstein 2003; Kinbrell 2011a, b; Lidwell, et al. 2010; Lopez 2005; Norman 1990, 2010; Norman and Draper 1986; Papaneck 2009; Suri and IDEO 2005; Thaler and Sunstein 2008; The Economist 2012; Ylirisku and Buur 2007) |
| Structural Vulnerabilities: Policy workers, e-government users and those who assist them with online government services act within varying degrees and types of structural vulnerability. For example, experiencing e-government in public places exposes applicants to subjective vulnerabilities from the amount of help they can receive to the length of time allotted on a computer. There are individual vulnerabilities as well, including their educational, technological, physical and cognitive abilities. There are also micro-level vulnerabilities, such as the design of government websites. Policy workers are subject to time and resource constraints, among other limitations, to demonstrate program efficiency and effectiveness. By understanding these vulnerabilities, then the design, implementation, evaluation and overall user experience of e-government programs can be improved. | (Colebatch, et al. 2010; Farmer 2003, 2004; Goode 2010; Gordon 1994; Greenbaum, et al. 2008; Holmes 2007, 2011; Lipsky 2010; MacLeod 2003; Maskovsky 2000; Morgen, et al. 2010; Shore, et al. 2011; Susser 1996; Susser and Kreniske 1987; Williams 2010) |
| Triangulation: Comparing multiple datasets based on different data gathering techniques, particularly ethnographic ones can provide a more holistic understanding of the ideological assemblage, aims and limitations of e-government programs, and help account for informant inconsistencies. These data may include evaluative and design practices as well as the structural vulnerabilities of users, those who assist them as well as policy workers. | (Angrosino 2007; Barnes and Vidgen 2006; Bernard, et al. 1984; Bernard, et al. 1986; Bird 2003; Freeman, et al. 1987; Goffman 1959, 1983; Homburg, et al. 2012) |
CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

Overview

This chapter begins with a summary of findings according to each of the three overarching research questions. Policy recommendations follow. The ways in which the research results have already been disseminated will be discussed as well as plans for further sharing the findings. I then include future research aims and reflect on the dissertation experience overall. Finally, there is an epilogue about how ACCESS and e-government is being experienced today in Anora County based on relatively recent conversations with former informants at HELP and Library B.

The First Research Question

(Q1) What do DCF officials (a) know or articulate about the experiences of ACCESS applicants at public libraries and NGOs as well as the employees there who assist them; how do the officials (b) assess these experiences and (c) address the applicants’ and employees’ challenges with ACCESS? The unwillingness of DCF officials to answer any questions left me few options aside from the three government reports covered in Chapter 3. That Chapter demonstrated DCF leadership knew of several challenges experienced by applicants, including trying to speak with a DCF employee at the toll free number, being able to access and use the computer, and to comprehend the questions on
the application itself, among other difficulties (Cody, et al. 2008). DCF officials created the Community Partner network to address these challenges, effectively shifting its oversight of applicants’ struggles with accessibility and usability to local organizations, including public libraries. The devolution of state responsibility was not accompanied by remuneration to most organizations in the Partner network nor any public library in the state.

Chapter 3 also showed how clients as well as employees of local community organizations provided largely positive feedback about their interactions with the ACCESS program. Today, there is no longer a caseworker with the discretionary power to withhold services, make clients wait unnecessarily or feel degraded. Applicants with the educational and technical skills and ability to access the Internet or who can find these resources at public libraries and NGOs have greater personal agency in some ways under the new “self-sufficiency model.”

Additionally, positive comments about ACCESS among research participants emphasized the functional aspects of the program (i.e., efficiency, accessibility and usability). Little, if anything, was mentioned of ACCESS and e-government as vehicles to improve civic participation and democratic values or that DCF was upholding its social obligation to guarantee public services. We might expect a different response if there was a social citizenship-oriented understanding of government’s role in society, and if those research participants conceived of e-government as having the capacity to advance democracy.
Further, Chapter 3 described how the findings from the optional user feedback form proved to DCF officials that clients were satisfied with the ACCESS experience. This evaluation was consistently portrayed as a neutral tool rather than a means to advance the political aims or rationale for the design of the ACCESS program (Cody, et al. 2008; Lange 2009). Unpacking six years’ worth of data produced by that form in Chapter 7 revealed contradictions in applicants’ responses. It also showed the curious static number of low respondents who found the form “difficult” even though the number of people receiving ACCESS ballooned by about two million users over that time (DCF 2012c). Additionally, the questions and metrics on the feedback form itself were not optimal for assessing the user-experience. The form was also inserted so early in the application process that clients could not assess their overall experience. Further, DCF officials had no way of determining whether those who complete the feedback form are a representative sample of the applicant population. Effectively, the statistical grounds on which the data were generalized to most applicants had low external validity.

Collectively, these conclusions demonstrate at the minimum DCF leadership has been unaware for more than half a decade of the questionable data its user feedback form produces. Based on its still ongoing evaluative practice, DCF officials do not have a holistic understanding of the ACCESS user experience. What about their understanding of the experiences of employees at public libraries and NGOs? My inability to acquire the data from the annual paper questionnaire that Community Partners complete leaves this question
unanswered. At least on the questionnaire, however, Partners can write their comments and rank on a Likert scale the overall experiences of their clients, something unavailable on the applicant feedback form.

**The Second Research Question**

(Q2) How do ACCESS applicants and those who assist them at public libraries and NGOs (a) *articulate* and (b) *assess* their own experiences, and (c) *address* their challenges with the application process? Several conclusions emerge from the findings to answer these questions. The first is ACCESS has obligated library employees and many NGOs through an “unfunded mandate” to help lower-income people who seek out assistance either of their own accord or through DCF’s prompting.

The second conclusion is that it is unclear why there was a difference between applicants’ self-reported challenges with the application process and their struggles observed by the library and NGOs employees and me. One reason may include applicants’ attempts to avoid embarrassment (Goffman 1959, 1983). Moreover, applicants’ behaviors illustrated complex life situations that do not easily fit within the predefined categories of an online application process. Participant-observations revealed constant problems applicants encountered with ACCESS even though the ethnographic survey findings showed that applicants are much more laudatory of the program than employees. While the employees were substantially more critical of ACCESS, they joined the applicants in agreeing e-government generally is better for the nation overall.
ACCESS was described as a “game” that involves certain tactics for applicants to negotiate the process successfully as well as alliances between Community Partners and the DCF Community Liaison. Different material consequences arise for applicants based on their ability to overcome hurdles and their Partner’s rapport with the Liaison. Further, library employees not in the Partner network and network members who felt neglected by their Liaison were comparably self-reliant in their attempts to help patrons.

The last overriding conclusion is that when research participants discuss the positive attributes of e-government and ACCESS, they do so mainly from a utilitarian perspective (i.e., efficiency, accessibility and usability). This description complements the findings of DCF management mentioned previously for why applicants are satisfied with the program. These positive perceptions of ACCESS did not include validating government responsibility to the citizenry or improving civic engagement or government transparency. Comparing research participants’ positive comments to their negative descriptions of e-government and ACCESS, we find the absence of an emotive connection to government reinterpreted as government being “uncaring,” “impersonal” and “cold.”

The Proposed Model

The findings from the first two research questions advanced a model for an anthropology of e-government. The model is meant as a theoretical and methodological strategy to analyze e-government anthropologically. It is not intended to be definitive, but rather heuristic or serving as a guide to encourage future research in this aim. The model contains various elements discussed
throughout this dissertation. They include two ideological orientations in the way Americans view the relationship between citizens and government. These views are neither necessarily mutually exclusive nor do they preclude one from maintaining multiple understandings of citizenship at any given moment. They are instead two dominant themes that emerged from the data.¹¹

The first I called “taxpayer citizenship.” It is a popular term employed by national and state officials as well the mainstream media and the public administration literature (DCF 2011c; Kettl 2002; NPR 2012; Thomas 2012; US Congress 2012b; USDA 2010). Taxpayer citizenship used here means an ideology of government’s relationship with citizens that prioritize the efficient management of public money. Of course, which government programs should be funded and by how much is often based on the worldview of the individual being asked (Mettler 2010).

The second type of citizenship is a widely recognized concept in the social sciences and philosophy, known as “social citizenship” (Fraser and Gordon 1992; Junge 2012; Korpi 1989; Marshall 1950). It means the social or moral obligation of government towards the citizenry. It is used here to describe policy workers in e-government who do not privilege the efficiency of public programs ahead of its accessibility and usability. The concept is also applied here to mean the broader capacity of government to create a democracy and guarantee social rights and

¹¹ It is important to note that the manner in which taxpayer and social citizenship have been described here often critiqued the responsibility of government towards the citizenry. There is of course a responsibility of citizens toward one another as well as the government to ensure a cohesive and sustainable society.
justice (Morgen and Maskovsky 2003). Taxpayer and social citizenship need not be in conflict, nor must the efficiency and effectiveness of government programs be at odds. However, striking a balance appears to be a formidable challenge for both policy workers and the public in a context of limited funding.

Additional theoretical elements of the framework included how the “audit culture” of government advances ideological aims (Neave 1988; Strathern 2000). These aims include taxpayer citizenship and the power afforded to evaluative instruments to verify efficiency. The pressure on government employees to demonstrate efficiency through evaluative criteria can actually diminish the effectiveness of people to participate in public programs (Pounds 2012; Soss, et al. 2011).

Efficiency-driven policies contribute towards the creation of e-government programs and the automation of services that do not always accommodate for the complexities of citizens’ lives. Further, the resources available to ACCESS applicants at libraries and NGOs are not uniform and present different constraints, strengths, and needs that do not easily fit within a standardized application process.

Prioritizing program efficiency, in the case of ACCESS, occurred from its inception. The Florida legislature cut funding to DCF and it had to develop a way to provide services in light of these constraints. American e-government is embedded with an efficiency-driven ideology that stresses “personal responsibility.” The self-sufficiency narrative is another attribute of taxpayer citizenship. Additionally, the transfer of state oversight to public libraries and
NGOs that are forced to help patrons access and use online services means e-government program are often “unfunded mandates” (Gibson, et al. 2009:8). ACCESS is an example of this, whereby it necessitates the assistance of local actors while providing little to no financial and administrative support.

“Structural vulnerability” (Holmes 2011) is included in the model because it encompasses the continuum of constraints in which e-government users and those who assist them experience government electronically. Along this continuum, applicants are vulnerable to the ideology of taxpayer citizenship and notions of personal responsibility that materialize into a self-directed, automated application process for public services. Vulnerabilities also include educational and technological illiteracy as well as the physical and cognitive impairments that standardized application processes may not accommodate. Vulnerabilities encompass information architecture or the design of websites that express taxpayer citizenship through stern warnings of fraud and nudging users towards the online application rather than its downloadable paper format. Herein lies the methodological aspect of structural vulnerability by teasing out the seemingly innocuous ways information is designed and recognizing the power of design to influence the user experience in predictable ways (Ariely 2008).

Design itself is part of the proposed model because it can function as a means to disenfranchise users. Design also helps to understand the internalization of state control by reinforcing the dominant discourse of self-sufficiency. Design too offers pathways to improve how people experience e-
government and their ability to acquire the information and services they are seeking.

Disincentives to apply for welfare services have been documented in an e-government Medicaid program by an anthropologist (Lopez 2005). Lopez found “technical disenfranchisement” to be common through both the technology and the technicalities of how individuals experience the application process. I too found the same occurring among ACCESS applicants. Whether or not the disincentives I documented were intentionally designed is unknown. What is known, however, is applicants experienced them meaningfully.

The final methodological element of the model is triangulation. Comparing multiple datasets through different data gathering techniques, particularly ethnography, is important to the framework. While this may be the *modus operandi* of anthropological research, the same cannot be said for e-government (Scholl 2011). Triangulation can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ideological assemblage shaping the design of e-government programs. It can also unearth the range of structural vulnerabilities experienced by users and those who assist them. Collectively, the framework contains both methodological and theoretical suggestions for advancing an anthropological analysis of e-government.

**Policy Recommendations**

The first recommendation comes from an overarching conclusion of this research, namely that people’s life circumstances cannot easily fit into a standardized application process. Questions asked of parents on the application
about whether or not their babies are married, have children of their own, or have been convicted of a crime speak to this. The same can be said about applicants who are widowed and receive their spouse’s social security deposits and do not know whether this counts as household income or not. The Florida legislature’s evaluative and research body, the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA), recommended to DCF management in 2008 that DCF alone, not Community Partners, should serve as “the single point of contact during eligibility determination” to ensure all applicants have the necessary assistance (OPPAGA 2008:11). Doing so, the argument went, would also likely reduce the burden on the call system with general questions and explanations for the decline of eligibility. This recommendation has yet to be enacted and should be revisited by DCF officials.

The U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA) Website

Another recommendation is to follow an exemplar of U.S. e-government programs, namely the website for SSA. The SSA hired the design and innovation firm IDEO “to get significantly more retirees filing online by 2015, [so] IDEO sent its researchers and designers out to watch how people used the Social Security offices, Web site, and forms” (Metropolis Magazine 2011). The company used ethnographic techniques to redesign the website (see Figure 10.1) (SSA 2012c).

Notice there are no noticeable fraud warnings “welcoming” users to the website. At the top right side of the SSA homepage in the image below is a link to “Accessibility Help.” Selecting it provides information about a toll free number to access an automated phone system to “conduct some business” 24/7, and there
is another toll free number with the times one can call to speak to an SSA employee during the week (SSA 2012a).

The help screen, not shown here, also has an “Accessibility Commitment” at the top of the page, beginning with, “The Social Security Administration is committed to making our programs, benefits, services and facilities, and information and communications technology accessible [to] everyone” (SSA 2012a).

There is specific information for people unable to type or use a keyboard or who are blind, deaf or hard of hearing. People can complete the form in 15 languages besides English and there is a toll free number they can call for assistance in their language. There is also a video lasting less than one minute, along with its transcript, that explains the entire application process, how long it will take, and that one’s personal information will be “safe and secure” (SSA 2012b). The website is designed to be welcoming and flexible, allowing for a
wide variety of users. These considerations are standard design practices and are required on federal websites (Jaeger 2006a; Lidwell, et al. 2010:16), however, as ACCESS demonstrates these laws may not be adopted or enforced at the state level.

What does all of it mean in terms of user satisfaction? Quite a lot actually, according to the official metric of government services, known as the “American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI)” (Fornell, et al. 1996). The ACSI was created at the University of Michigan’s business school and for about $15,000 to $25,000 a year is can be used to conduct quarterly measures of the public's satisfaction with government services, including websites (ForeSee 2012; Wood, et al. 2008). Although this evaluative technique lacks interviews and think alouds, the SSA website ranked first among 102 different government websites in the fourth quarter of 2011 (ACSI 2012). Taxpayer and social citizenship can be synthesized to produce efficient and effective e-government, minimizing distinctions between “deserving” people applying for social security and “undeserving” individuals seeking food and unemployment assistance.

Evaluative Techniques

The final recommendations involve how DCF evaluates ACCESS applicants’ experiences. The format of the optional user feedback form could be based on DCF’s questionnaire for Community Partners, which includes Likert scales and a space to write comments. A revised user feedback form should add a question about whether applicants are applying at home or at a public library, since applicants are already asked if they apply at a community organization or a
DCF office. The user feedback form should be offered twice. It could remain where it is, but its existence must be made clearer to users. This means it can no longer be buried it at the bottom of the screen that appears after users submit their application online. The second place an evaluation should be offered is after clients create a My ACCESS account, which occurs once they have submitted all of their documents and completed an interview, if required. DCF management should also consider visiting anonymously its remaining offices and Community Partners posing as prospective clients, including as non-English speakers and other historically vulnerable populations. An NGO informant suggested this to me as a technique for improving applicants’ experience.

Finally, DCF should work closely with the public library system, keeping them informed of changes it makes to the ACCESS application process. There is a network of Florida e-government librarians who meet monthly to talk about their challenges and share ideas. They have had someone from DCF speak to them about ACCESS in the past, according to one of my library informants. The lines of communication exist between DCF and libraries, and should be used regularly to disseminate information and to learn how the application process can be improved. If librarians and other Community Partners are exposed to the ACCESS user experience everyday, then why not leverage their knowledge periodically to learn how the process is going? Further, DCF should support increases in annual state and county appropriation to public libraries. The librarians are doing the work of multiple government agencies that nudge the citizenry online to conduct their affairs with government. Also, it is unlikely DCF
will begin paying more NGOs for their service, but there should be a reallocation of existing resources to help the most vulnerable in Florida. This includes non-native English speakers, migrants and the homeless. According to the database DCF provided me, it does not pay any Community Partner in the state whose primary mission is helping these populations.

**Dissemination of Results**

I have shared my findings during the data analysis and writing process through different media. They include a local PechaKucha presentation, the American Anthropological Association’s annual conference, the International Conference on Communities and Technologies, the Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference, and the iSchools Conference. I am in the final stages of submitting a book chapter about e-government evaluation and am preparing articles to be submitted to the anthropological journal the *Annals of Anthropological Practice*.

I also gave every research participant the option of receiving a summary of the research. Once this is crafted, I plan to use the Internet as the means for them to access the findings by sending the website address to their email address or mobile phone. Some informants have neither, and only provided me a mailing address, they will receive a paper copy. I also plan on sharing my findings via the website to DCF, OPPAGA, GAO and USDA officials, local and state representatives as well as the network of e-government Florida librarians. Finally, I will inquire with both the management of the Anora County library system as well as HELP if they would like me to present my findings.
**Future Research**

I would like to continue working towards improving the usability and accessibility of e-government. This means researching ways of developing greater parity between social and taxpayer citizenship through the design of e-government programs. I am reminded of what one NGO informant said to me about her ACCESS clients: “They come here and sit there. They want you to hear them, to hear how they’re crying inside. How they’re hurting inside. You know? And finally there’s somebody who’s going to listen [...] as I’m sitting here typing their application, I can be asking them other questions too, you know?”

Accounting for the emotive, complex, messiness of our lives is one thing another human being can be trained and attuned to when helping people with e-government. These sorts of considerations need to be developed alongside the existing taxpayer ideology and personal responsibility narrative upon which U.S. e-government and its evaluative practices appear to be based.

I think my future research will examine citizenship as it relates to mobile phone technology and the free applications government agencies are designing to engage with the citizenry. Jennifer Pahlka (2012), the director of *Code for America*, an NGO based in San Francisco, gave a TED Talk about her organization that encourages information designers and other information technology specialists to take an 11-month sabbatical from their jobs. During that time, they use their skills to create computer applications and e-government websites that meet the objectives of government agencies and are meaningful and usable by the public. In speaking about the applications (apps) they create,
she said: "These apps remind us that we’re not just consumers [...] putting in our taxes and getting back services. We're more than that. We're citizens and we're not going to fix government until we fix citizenship" (Pahlka 2012). Her statement is meant to spark reflection on citizenship besides the taxpayer typology, and I agree. Researching the work of Code for America is one of my future research interests.

Reflections

Last year a recently graduated PhD said to me how a dissertation is a tremendous learning experience because it helps one to realize everything they should have done differently. The same can be said about my experience and I have learned greatly from it. The near total silence from DCF officials during my research proved challenging and yet they disclosed their datasets when asked. I suspect Florida’s Sunshine laws had something to do with this.

ACCESS applicants’ reluctance to be interviewed was so disconcerting that I felt asking them certain demographic questions would have made it even less likely for them to speak with me. I was then confounded when they readily agreed to participate in the survey. Additionally, the depth and breadth of informant inconsistency in my work has strengthened my resolve to triangulate data findings and to collaborate with other e-government researchers in this aim.

Finally, the ACCESS program for many of my research participants and ostensibly for DCF officials is interpreted as an efficiency-generating instrument, and in many ways it is. ACCESS for me, however, is symbolic of the larger phenomenon of e-government, the ideologies assembled within it, and how they
are deployed through design, rhetoric and evaluation in different ways. I have attempted here to analyze these ways and their effects on Floridians. In essence, I relied on what Aaron Podolefsky (2011:81) calls “Anthropological thinking [which] is a habit of mind that begins by questioning fundamental categories of meaning.” The outcome of such questioning led me to develop a model for an anthropology of e-government. The model requires testing and refinement, including the way its components articulate with one another.

**Epilogue**

In March 2012, I returned to HELP and Library B to chat with my one-time research participants about how their lives are going and to give them an update on the status of my writing. At HELP, staffers described how one of the DCF employees who used to provide little, if any assistance, was now very responsive to their questions, enabling them to serve their clients better. I also noticed how one employee had a stack of paper applications on the table. This was a new practice. She was distributing paper applications more readily to anyone uncomfortable with using computers rather than instructing them in remedial technological usage. It appeared she had developed a workaround to the time it takes to help the technologically illiterate. She was becoming more efficient and admitted to me that though the paper application may slow down the processing of applications it was a matter for DCF to deal with, not her.

HELP staffers also shared with me how in December 2011, DCF started offering individuals the option to receive text messages informing them how much money they have left to purchase food on their Electronic Benefits Transfer
(EBT) card. This card contains SNAP money for food purchases and functions like a credit card. DCF also created a new automatic option it offers to applicants who call the toll free number to conduct an interview over the phone. The HELP employee said the toll free number’s voicemail box still becomes full and disconnects users. When it happens, HELP staffers contact their DCF Community Liaison on behalf of their clients and readily receive assistance.

My visit to Library B revealed that the Clerk of the Circuit Court for the County has now joined DCF and other state government agencies in shifting responsibility for completing online applications to local libraries. The Clerk’s office has apparently reduced or stopped providing the public with paper documents they need to file for legal proceedings, according to the librarians. The documents were scanned and put online. The librarians added that the Clerk’s office is telling people who need these legal documents, dealing with divorce, child support, and domestic violence, to “go to the library” to print them.

A one-time informant at the library took me to the Clerk’s website and selected the “family law” section. I counted 43 links, each identified as separate “packets” with a one-sentence description, such as “Dissolution of Marriage (both parties agree).” She opened this document and showed me how it is 183 pages long. Library patrons are printing the entire thing without knowing it is written in Spanish and English and that they only need to file certain pages. The rest of the document is for explanatory purposes. Printing costs $0.20 a page; Library B’s copy/printing machine only takes coins, and there is no machine to make change. The librarians described similar problems they experienced when
ACCESS was first created: no one told them about it, they did not know how to respond at first, and now they are coping as best as they can. Privileging taxpayer citizenship ahead of social citizenship continues as does prioritizing efficient government services ahead of their accessibility and usability.
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APPENDIX I: IRB APPROVALS

June 23, 2009

Marc K. Hebert
Anthropology
SOC 107

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: 108056 G
Title: ACCESS Florida: Learning from the Experiences of Its Users, Technology Providers and Managers
Study Approval Period: 06/19/2009 to 06/18/2010

Dear Mr. Herbert:

On June 19, 2009, Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above protocol for the period indicated above. It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review based on the federal expedited category number six (6): Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes; and seven (7): Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt).

Approval included with waiver of documentation of informed consent.

Please note, if applicable, the enclosed informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on page one of the form. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form. Make copies from the enclosed original.

Please reference the above IRB protocol number in all correspondence regarding this protocol with the IRB or the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance. In addition, you can find the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Quick Reference Guide providing guidelines and resources to assist you in meeting your responsibilities in the conduct of human participant research on our website. Please read this guide carefully. It is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB.
We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-2036.

Sincerely,

Krista Kutash, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Attachments: (If applicable) IRB-Approved, Stamped Informed Consent/Assent Documents(s)

Cc: Anna Davis/bnh/cd, USF IRB Professional Staff
    Susan Greenbaum, PhD
June 29, 2010

Marc Hebert  
Dept of Anthropology  
SOC 107

RE: Expedited Approval for Continuing Review  
IRB#: 108056  
Title: ACCESS Florida: Learning from the Experiences of Its Users, Technology Providers and Managers  
Study Approval Period: 06/11/2010 to 06/11/2011

Dear Mr. Hebert:

On June 11, 2010, Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above protocol for the period indicated above. It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review based on the federal expedited category number 6 & 7.

Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.

Please note, if applicable, only use the IRB-Approved and stamped consent forms for participants to sign. The enclosed informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on page one of the form. Make copies from the enclosed original.

Please reference the above IRB protocol number in all correspondence regarding this protocol with the IRB or the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance. In addition, you can find the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Quick Reference Guide providing guidelines and resources to assist you in meeting your responsibilities in the conduction of human participant research on our website. Please read this guide carefully. It is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB.
We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-7104.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Krista Kutash, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Cc: Anna Davis/bb, USF IRB Professional Staff