



# Commonwealth of Massachusetts Launches Cross-Agency Data Sharing Agreement to Improve Coordination Across State Agencies

State and federally funded public assistance programs are designed to support a multitude of basic needs, such as food and housing, in order to promote economic stability and mobility. As individuals and families transition from moments of crisis to short-term stability and eventually self-sufficiency and economic mobility, they are expected to identify their own needs and navigate siloed processes to secure the right mix of supports. Recognizing that intergenerational cycles of poverty are reinforced by this fragmented system, the Baker-Polito Administration launched the Learn to Earn (LTE) Initiative in 2017. LTE is a cross-agency, multi-pronged initiative intended to improve coordination of public benefits and education and workforce programs to help unemployed and underemployed individuals and families access and sustain a path to economic mobility. One key aspect of LTE is sharing and analyzing data to identify and better understand the individuals and families currently receiving one or more public benefits and interacting with multiple agencies' programs.

**“For the first time, state agencies will have access to actionable cross-agency data to inform and guide policymaking.”**

– Ann Reale, Undersecretary and Chief Operating Officer,  
Executive Office of Education

## RESULTS

The Commonwealth sought to create intentional and impactful coordination across agencies to promote better services, experiences, and outcomes for individuals and families receiving public assistance. The LTE “Data Team,” supported by Third Sector, aimed to advance this goal by, for the first time, using shared agency data across nine agencies and six public assistance programs to systematically track shared client populations, benefits utilized, and outcomes achieved.

**Utilized Statewide Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** which provides a general legal framework and processes for data-sharing at scale, signed by all nine Executive Branch secretariats and all of the state agencies accountable to them in the fall of 2018. The LTE data team used this framework for the first time, thereby paving the way for future data sharing agreements.

## RESULTS CONTINUED

### Signed Largest Data Use Agreement (DULA)

**in the State** which was the first data sharing project facilitated through the new statewide MOU process.

The LTE DULA was signed in May 2019 by 14 agencies - five secretariats and the nine agencies accountable to them.

### Strengthened Communication and Understanding across 14 state agencies

The LTE Common Client DULA will enable us to learn more about how families currently participate in these programs, and how that participation relates to educational attainment, income, and employment.

Moving forward, the Commonwealth plans to apply these tools and relationships to better understand and improve policy and outcomes for individuals who rely on public benefits throughout the Commonwealth.

## ACTION

The LTE Data Team had three primary goals: (i) to align on the shared goals, use cases, and mutual benefit of sharing data for the participating agencies, (ii) to identify the data available to address those goals, and (iii) to establish governance structures and technological protocols in order to ensure that the data was secure, protected, and only used for the agreed upon purposes. Third Sector supported the LTE Data Team through project management and stakeholder engagement:

- **Establishing Relationships Across Agencies and Secretariats:**

Throughout the Learn to Earn initiative, individuals from across five secretariats and the nine agencies accountable to them were called upon for their input and buy-in which resulted in greater understanding of other agencies' needs.

Third Sector supported the content creation for and facilitation of monthly large Working Group meetings (40+ individuals across 14 agencies) and bi-weekly small group meetings across 3 subcommittees: (i) Value Extraction and Learning (i.e., policy), (ii) Technology and Security, and (iii) Governance (i.e., legal).

- **Drafting the DULA:**

Third Sector developed frameworks to address broader issues related to privacy protection, data ownership, usage rights, and architecture that will expedite the process of accessing data at scale. The DULA was signed by all inter-agency parties in May of 2019.

## ABOUT

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts** The Learn to Earn Initiative (LTE), is a comprehensive approach to providing unemployed and underemployed individuals who are receiving assistance from public benefit programs with the supports, skills, and credentials they need to gain and retain employment in occupations for which employers have persistent demand. LTE Partnerships will develop and test models to serve participants in the context of their family/ household. LTE Programs will help participants set and achieve goals necessary for employment and sustained economic stability, such as maintaining and growing family net resources and minimizing the real or perceived potential impact of increased earned income on benefit receipt, including improving coordination across benefit programs and reducing benefit cliff effects.

**Empowering Families** was a national cohort of government agencies that received technical assistance from Third Sector to support improved outcomes for children and families through the use of outcomes-oriented contracting. The initiative was funded by a Social Innovation Fund grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

**Third Sector** is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that is transforming the way communities connect people with human services. We partner with governments, providers, and their partners to generate positive, measurable outcomes for the people they serve.

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