



Rutgers Center for
State Health Policy

June 2006

State Policy in Practice

Community Living Exchange

Funded by Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)

Sustaining Systems Change in Hawai`i:
Real Choices Access Website Project

Rebecca Rude Ozaki
Susan C. Reinhard
Ann Bemis



This document was prepared by Susan C. Reinhard and Ann Bemis of the Rutgers Center for State Health Policy (CSHP) and Rebecca Rude Ozaki of the University of Hawai`i at Manoa - Center on Disability Studies.

Prepared for:



Rutgers Center for
State Health Policy

Susan C. Reinhard & Marlene A. Walsh



Robert Mollica

The Community Living Exchange at Rutgers/NASHP provides technical assistance to the Real Choice Systems Change grantees funded by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

We collaborate with multiple technical assistance partners, including ILRU, the Muskie School of Public Service, National Disability Institute, Auerbach Consulting Inc., and many others around the nation.

Rutgers Center for State Health Policy
55 Commercial Avenue, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1340
Voice: 732-932-3105 - Fax: 732-932-0069
Website: www.cshp.rutgers.edu/cle

This document was developed under Grant No. P-91512/2 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government. Please include this disclaimer whenever copying or using all or any part of this document in dissemination activities.

SATE POLICY IN PRACTICE: SUSTAINING SYSTEMS CHANGE IN HAWAII: *REAL CHOICES* ACCESS WEBSITE PROJECT

**Rebecca Rude Ozaki
Susan Reinhard
Ann Bemis**

June 2006

Summary

Hawai`i's *Real Choices* is an innovative web-based single-entry-point (SEP) system¹ designed for consumers, by consumers and service professionals, that provides information about community options for people of all ages with a disability and those with long-term care needs. It is intended to provide a framework to support community partnerships among persons with disabilities and those with long-term care needs, self-advocates and consumer representatives, and for-profit and non-profit agencies. It was designed in response to a growing demand for improved access to information and services by many people with disabilities and long-term care needs.

Real Choices makes use of the strengths of public agencies, private enterprises, and individual citizens to establish a community of stakeholders in every region where the system is deployed. Their participation ensures *Real Choices* meets the needs of the people. Also, the unique public/private collaboration achieves a level of success that sustains the operation and growth of the information system without relying on long-term public funding.

The *Real Choices* website went live in February 2003. It has continued to expand both in capabilities and in its user base. This *Policy in Practice* brief is one of a series of technical assistance documents that highlights infrastructure changes that have been sustained by grantees of the Real Choice Systems Change initiative funded by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).² This brief focuses on one of the grantees that invested in web-based information and assistance infrastructure development.³

¹ Hawaii defines single entry point system as a virtual system for providing information and assistance to persons of all ages and disabilities. It does not include service authorization or case management.

² See www.cshp.rutgers.edu/cle "Product List" for a comprehensive list of reports.

³ The Rutgers/NASHP Community Living Exchange has been working with several states that have invested in these developments, including South Carolina, Arkansas and Florida.

Major Points

- *Real Choices* offers a seamless information gateway through which individuals and their advocates can identify, learn about and interact with resources available from providers and public agencies that meet their needs. Through its associated services, *Real Choices* assists them in making independent, informed choices about their daily lives and future.
- The Hawai`i *Real Choices* website is one of the first cross-disability, “universal use” information systems in the country.
- The Hawai`i *Real Choices* website serves as a model for collaborative projects combining public and private funding. Sustainability of the project was addressed from the onset through this partnership.
- The project employs communication technology to deliver a product that meets the needs of a diverse consumer population and creates connections across wide cultural and geographic separations.
- Through its global entry point, *Real Choices* offers a “no door is a wrong door” approach so that users can easily access a broad range of information and services. This approach is the foundation for delivering information and resources to support community-living.
- Hawai`i *Real Choices* ensured continuous quality assurance with the establishment of a consumer-driven committee with industry representation to continually monitor the project’s progress and promote policies that enable people to have choices about their home and community-based living options. Training is also provided to consumers, family members, and agencies on using the web-based information system.
- A distinctive and powerful aspect of *Real Choices* is its application of an informal public/private partnership. *Real Choices* makes use of the strengths of public agencies, private enterprises, and individual citizens to establish a community of stakeholders in every region where the system is deployed. Their participation ensures *Real Choices* meets the needs of the people and also that it achieves a level of commercial success that sustains operation and growth without relying on long-term public funding.

Background

The Hawai`i State Department of Human Services (DHS) offers individuals a broad range of options for people with disabilities and those who have long-term care needs who wish to live in a community setting. In an effort to make these offerings more accessible, Hawai`i DHS envisioned a one-stop resource center/virtual system that would be the foundation for delivering information and resources to support community living. This type of Single-Entry-Point (SEP) system provides streamlined access to a coordinated array of long-term and supportive services.⁴

In October 2001 and March 2002, Hawai`i received two federal grants that funded Hawai`i *Real Choices ACCESS* (Accountability for Consumer Choice and Entry Support System), hereafter referred to as *Real Choices*, an Internet-based SEP resource center and information system. Both grants were administered by the University of Hawai`i at Manoa-Center on Disability Studies, in collaboration with numerous state agencies, including the Department of Human Services, the statewide Workforce Development Council, and the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations. *Real Choices* was designed in response to a growing demand for improved access to information and services by many people with disabilities and long-term care needs. The first award from the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) totaled \$1.35 million, and was given to the Hawai`i DHS to fund design and implementation of the SEP website.

The second grant was the Hawai`i Workforce Partnership for Persons with Disabilities Project, awarded by the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. The focus of this Workforce Incentive award was to capitalize on the development of the SEP and to advance the effectiveness of the Hawai`i One-Stop Centers by providing an electronic infrastructure for the Workforce Investment partners.

The Hawai`i *Real Choices* project also received in-kind contributions for sustainability through an agreement that Hawai`i formed with a private for-profit business, AssistGuide, Inc. AssistGuide provides software and Internet services specifically targeted toward helping states to disseminate information on disabilities and long-term care services.

The Hawai`i *Real Choices* project has been committed to creating a website that includes the following provisions:

- In-depth, up-to-date information about private and public services, products and resources statewide for consumers and service providers;
- Universal design concepts to create a “user friendly” website; and,
- A system to match consumer needs with existing services.

⁴ See footnote ¹ for definition.

Additionally, Hawai`i *Real Choices* focused on ensuring the success of the project by:

- Addressing continuous quality assurance with the establishment of a consumer-driven committee (i.e., the Governing Council) with industry representation to continually monitor the project's progress and promote policies that enable people to have choices about their home and community-based living options.
- Providing statewide training to consumers, family members, and agencies on using the web-based information system.

The website is intended to provide a framework to support community partnerships among persons with disabilities and those with long-term care needs, self-advocates and consumer representatives, and for-profit and non-profit agencies. Other key stakeholders include the Department of Human Services-Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), Department of Health-Developmental Disabilities Division (DOH-DDD), Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC), Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB), Adult Mental Health Division (AMHD), the Work Hawai`i/Oahu WorkLinks Consortium (OWL), Executive Office on Aging (EOA), and Elderly Affairs Division-City and County of Honolulu.

Program Practices

Hawai`i's *Real Choices* is an innovative web-based SEP system designed for consumers, by consumers and service professionals that provides information about community options for people of all ages with a disability and those with long-term care needs. It is one of the first cross-disability, "universal use" information systems in the country. Through its global entry point, www.RealChoices.org, it offers a "no door is a wrong door" approach so that a user can easily access a broad range of information and services. *Real Choices* simplifies consumer access to an otherwise confusing and disconnected world of products, services, government programs, and helpful information. Real Choices is not just a website, rather it is an interactive online system, providing an infrastructure for individuals with challenges who are seeking answers to questions. It assists them by maximizing their time and efforts as they search for options within their community. The information needs served by *Real Choices* include healthcare, housing, transportation, employment, financial support, education, civil rights, assistive technology, daily living and much more.

Real Choices offers a seamless information gateway through which individuals and their advocates can identify, learn about and interact with resources available from providers and public agencies that meet their needs. Through its associated services, *Real Choices* assists them in making independent, informed choices about their daily lives and future. *Real Choices* also promotes an opportunity for Systems Change through the active involvement of public agencies and providers. Improvements are facilitated by electronic information exchange, services tracking, system feedback, and data analysis.

During its inception, the Hawai`i *Real Choices* website was envisioned as a mechanism for uniting and fostering communication between numerous stakeholders, including state agencies, service providers, consumers and others. The goal of centralizing services while meeting the needs of a diverse consumer population was a requirement for a system that was intended to create connections across the cultural and geographic separations that naturally occur with Hawai`i's island geography.

Hawai`i's vision of creating a comprehensive SEP system began in 1996. However, the technological capabilities for providing a broad access, interactive system were not available until 2001, when the state entered a partnership with AssistGuide, an Internet business solutions company that provides technology systems exclusively for the senior, healthcare, and disabilities industries. AssistGuide had already begun building a database of service providers when Hawai`i approached the company for assistance. Through its partnership with Hawai`i, AssistGuide expanded its database of service providers into what exists today as the full service SEP *Real Choices* website (www.RealChoices.org).

From the beginning, the format and features of the website have been almost exclusively driven by user input. Hawai`i decided that the key to insuring continued utilization and long-term sustainability of the website was to provide a tool that met specific user needs and that incorporated user participation in its development. Stakeholders provided input in the planning phase of the project through several means. Statewide Community Meetings were organized so that consumers and community agencies had an opportunity to come together and discuss who they thought should be involved in the project, what questions they wanted answered, and the features and functions that would best meet their needs. Next, a Visioning Summit was organized, where 100 consumers, their representatives and organizations were introduced to the project by leaders from DHS, DOH-DDD, UH, and AssistGuide. The participants were divided into workgroups that identified the "Most Frequently Asked Questions" that they wanted answered in ten different life domains. These questions became the framework for the "Learn About" section on the website. Based on this input, a three day "Use Case" forum was conducted where participants identified desired functionalities of the website, defined the functions and determined how each component would relate to others on the website. A "Use Case" prototype was then tested by 100 participants, including consumers and agency personnel. Based upon feedback from this group, the website was evaluated and each function was revised where appropriate.

The *Real Choices* website went live in February 2003. It has continued to expand both in capabilities and in its user base. An indicator of its success is the increase in first time visitors to the site. The website now averages about 14,000 visitors per month. Since its inception, there have been more than 325,000 visitors to the *Real Choices* website, who spend an average of 8:24 minutes per session. Of those visitors, approximately 30 percent are repeat visitors.

Public-Partnership for Sustainability

The public-private partnership with AssistGuide has been a critical component of the Hawai'i SEP sustainability plan, which was envisioned from its inception. AssistGuide made a commitment to sustain the *Real Choices* website from the beginning of the grant. The company contributed in-kind services and goods to the project, including the foundation for the existing data base of service providers, which currently contains more than 150,000 organizations. Through a contract agreement with the University of Hawai'i, AssistGuide will maintain, update and operate the website for the next five years.

AssistGuide is a company that connects the senior and disability markets through innovative online systems that serve to increase self-education, simplify provider and finance selection, and reduce costs, time and paperwork. It provides a one-stop, regional and national long-term care and disability information system that targets employers and public/private service agencies as its primary market. Examples include:

Agencies: Online resource centers for federal, state and local government and non-profit agencies, including the National Council of Aging, Ohio, Missouri, California, Texas, South Carolina, Louisiana, New York, and Hawai'i where it is partnering with the University of Hawai'i.

Employers: Online eldercare and disability information solutions, integrated with long-term care benefit programs that are backed by national leaders in group long-term care insurance, as a means to offset the costs of long-term care to the public sector.

Long-Term Care/Disability Providers: AssistGuide has developed a custom suite of applications for product and service providers, trade associations and other organizations serving long-term care markets. This includes a menu of systems, services, content libraries, and pre-designed software modules. The content library and the direct online access to state and private providers is an extension to the *Real Choices* "Learn About" and "Services" sections. This business model serves both the private and public parties by leveraging the efforts of each to increase content and drive traffic.

Governing Council

A distinctive and powerful aspect of *Real Choices* is its application of an informal public/private partnership. While technology can be beneficial in serving the needs of people, when coupled with a community of stakeholders it can truly make a difference. *Real Choices* makes use of the strengths of public agencies, private enterprises, and individual citizens to establish a community of stakeholders in every region where the system is deployed. Their participation ensures *Real Choices* meets the needs of the people and also that it achieves a level of commercial success that sustains operation and growth without relying on long-term public funding.

The primary purpose of the Governing Council was to ensure that the goals and objectives of the Hawai`i *Real Choices* project were met. Fifty-six percent of the Governing Council's total membership was consumers. Consumer members included people with disabilities, family members or other individuals concerned for the well-being of individuals with disabilities, and representatives of consumer/family organizations. Leaders of major public and private service agencies were also members of the Governing Council.

- The Governing Council functioned as the decision-making body of the project and was tasked with ensuring that goals and objectives were met.
- The Governing Council was co-chaired first by Susan Chandler, Directory of Human Services and subsequently by Aileen Hiramatsu, Department of Human Services, Administrator, and Mark Obatake, former Executive Director of the Hawai`i Centers for Independent Living.
- The diverse membership was comprised of all stakeholder groups and public agencies, including representatives from the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, the Workforce Development Council, Oahu WorkLinks, the Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, the Department of Health, the Executive Office on Aging, other state Departments, and major public and private service agencies.
- Five members (15 percent) were from neighbor islands.
- Members of the Governing Council served on committees that assisted in the creation of the web-based system and additional support services, such as training plans and quality assurance.
- Representatives of all key stakeholder groups worked together with the Governing Council in collaboratively prioritizing needs, developing strategic action plans to address those needs, and recommending changes in policies and procedures to institutionalize and sustain innovations.

The Governing Council met 25 times during the course of the grant, and participated in 11 workgroups that held more than 60 meetings. It provided oversight for both the *Real Choices* and Hawai`i Workforce Partnership projects. Many members of the Governing Council participated in the development of the Hawai`i State Olmstead Plan. Upon the conclusion of these grants, the Governing Council was disbanded. However, members remain active in the community.

Service Providers

The primary goal of the website is to provide options and choices to individuals seeking information and services in their communities. For that reason, the stakeholders requested and the Governing Council agreed to allow all interested businesses and service providers' the ability to register online and to be listed on the website as an available service provider. Any business is able to register online independently. Should they

have a question, they can contact info@RealChoices.com or send a comment and staff will respond accordingly.

To encourage service providers to register on the *Real Choices* website, the Director of Human Services wrote a letter encouraging participation by registration on the site, and circulated it to approximately 1,500 service providers in Hawai`i. Currently, approximately 2,500 Hawai`i businesses are listed in the *Real Choices* database. This database was created with the assistance of AssistGuide through direct online registrations by businesses and through entries by *Real Choices* staff of select organizations. AssistGuide also reviews all provider registrations to help organizations to conform to conventions and to maintain the quality of information provided.

In order to make the website user-friendly, service providers can be searched in a variety of ways, including by keyword or by the name of the organization. The service provider determines what organizational information is included in its listing. The organization can choose to provide contact and location information, product and service descriptions, licenses/accreditations, accessibility options, a keyword classification for its services, and more.

The website contains a disclaimer stating that the information on the *Real Choices* website does not constitute endorsement of the services or products and that it is the users' responsibility to verify the information provided. However, because the website has experienced great success, along with the Hawai`i Aloha United Way (AUW) 211 information program, it is now identified as a foundation for access to information, as defined in the Hawai`i Olmsted Plan. As a result, there is a growing effort to assure the accuracy of service provider information that is displayed on the website. Hawai`i is working with state departments to insure that the information that consumers obtain on the site about service providers is correct. For example, the Department of Health provides *Real Choices* with a list of certified Residential Care Home providers in a database format. Service providers in this category are not allowed to register independently but must go through DOH to be included on the site. While it is currently not being implemented, one suggestion for insuring credibility of service providers is to include a symbol on the service provider record indicating that it is a state certified or licensed program. The agencies and organizations have also committed to maintain and keep current their information to assist consumers. To support this process, AssistGuide sends out a quarterly broadcast e-mail requesting updates to the organization/service provider's information.

Features and Functions of the *Real Choices* Website

The *Real Choices* website has undergone several phases of development and software upgrades during the course of the project. The components of the site have been developed collaboratively, with oversight from the Governing Council, workgroups, and in response to comments and feedback from usability testing and community meetings. Most content, layout and features were created based upon direct input from consumers.

The *Real Choices* Hawai`i website provides the following capabilities:

- Provision of information to consumers and professionals concerning a wide variety of health and human services topics.
- Look-up services for finding potential sources of assistance and products, including both private-pay and benefit-based services.
- Ability to interact with service providers, including identifying whether the program has openings, registering for services, and evaluating the provider.
- Screening for potential benefits programs, including Medicaid and others, based on an individual's needs and/or current situation (a new version is due for release in June 2006).
- Supporting the application process for programs with continually updated information and through use of electronic forms that minimize the need to re-enter data.
- Assisting individuals and professionals in tracking essential information for improved understanding and potential Systems Change.

The following sections provide greater detail on some of the significant technical features and functions of the website.

Forms Management

One component that is being used by select Workforce Investment Partners is the online management of electronic-forms, including intake and referrals. The electronic form can be filled out by the applicant and submitted to the receiving party online, thereby eliminating the need to use a printed version of the form (although not all agencies and organizations accept electronic versions of forms from consumers). Tools are provided to allow the organization to efficiently manage the receipt of the applications, and potential integration with in-house information systems. *Figure 1* is a sample screen of a tool used for reviewing a list of submitted application forms. The staff personnel can review the submitted form (in a view that is appropriate for each staff) and take certain actions on the form. Form Actions can be tailored for any organization, and include options to Open, Print, Email Sender, Approve and others. This system allows client-form database information to be securely stored and managed. This can reduce the costs associated with renewals and applying across multiple programs.

Figure 1

Show My Forms

Too many forms? Try narrowing results by using [form viewing](#) options.

Are you a Case Manager? Try looking at the [Case Manager Reports](#)

16 Forms Returned (Page 1 of 2) Forms per page: 15 Go to page: 1

[Previous Page](#) [Next Page](#)

Form ID	Date Submitted (CST)	Form Alias	Form Name	Date Last Processed (CST)	Agency	Status	Form Action
29026	1/17/2006 4:34:47 AM		Intake Form		Department of Human Services	Pending	Select Action Go
27952	9/15/2005 9:47:53 AM	Fran	Intake Form	11/22/2005 10:58:48 AM	Department of Human Services	Waiting for Information	Select Action Go
27941	9/15/2005 9:19:44 AM		Intake Form	9/15/2005 9:38:17 AM	Department of Human Services	Open	Select Action Go
Last Comment: Pending assessments to determine eligibility for VR services.							
27929	9/13/2005 1:02:19 PM		Intake Form	9/13/2005 3:42:16 PM	Department of Human Services	Waiting for Information	Select Action Go
27927	9/13/2005 12:55:40 PM		Intake Form		Department of Human Services	Pending	Select Action Go
27924	9/12/2005 3:40:44 PM		Intake Form	9/13/2005 3:41:14 PM	Department of Human Services	In Progress	Select Action Go
27922	9/12/2005 10:08:47		Intake Form		Department of Human Services	Pending	Select Action Go

Chat Forum

Consumers stated repeatedly that they wanted to be able to connect with other consumers through use of the website. The “Chat” concept was developed to improve access to and enhance a sense of community, and to foster communication. This is a component in the “Community” section that provides tools to enable the constituents to share information with each other. Tools such as online chats, discussion forums, and community calendars are just a few examples of how the website is leveraging these information services to enable consumers to engage and interact with each other.

The project conducted the first of four live moderated chats on the “The Power of Choice-Online Chat forum for Hawai`i Caregivers” in August 2004. A panel of five experts from various professions was available to answer questions. The same topic was repeated purposefully in several subsequent sessions to build upon issues identified in the earlier chat sessions.

Some technical issues still need to be resolved before these sessions can be made accessible to all consumers. Currently, affordable chat software that is screen reader friendly is not available. To join specific chat rooms that are accessible (can use screen reader software) can be costly. As an alternative solution, a telephone relay service was developed for the moderated chats, and after testing and approval by the majority of users, it was made available on the website. While this is an acceptable temporary

approach, it is not truly web-accessible for all users, which was a goal for this project. The need to develop accessible software for chat rooms remains an issue.

Electronic Forms (E-Forms)

One of the most recognized areas for efficiency improvement in government services is the reduction or elimination of paper-based processes. Estimates from national studies have calculated that \$10 to more than \$100 can be saved per form transaction by converting a paper-based process into an electronic one. The dramatic range in savings reflects the considerable differences in process costs and the extent of automation possible. AssistGuide developed a process called the OP-CIS services for conversion of paper application forms to electronic format, which provides the ability to deliver forms via the Internet to a web browser program (such as Microsoft Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator). *Real Choices* currently has two of the Department of Human Services' most accessed forms available as E-Forms, to help consumers to improve access to benefit programs, reduce processing time, and eliminate administrative costs. Using the features in "My Choices" and connecting to online secure E-Forms allows individuals to save data and automatically parse this information into existing online forms. The forms are available in three formats: user-friendly, text, and a form that can be readily tabbed from one field to another that was developed for agency personnel. These forms are:

- Hawai'i DHS 1100 Medical Assistance Application Form: Used to apply for medical assistance from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services.
- Hawai'i DHS 1240 Financial Assistance and Food Stamp Application Form: Used to apply for financial assistance or food stamps from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services.

More than 7,000 forms have been downloaded from the *Real Choices* site. While the technology is available, the forms are not accepted via e-mail by DHS. However, consumers are able to complete the form, securely save the content, and mail, fax, or hand deliver the document. Other forms are available through AssistGuide. The company has joint ownership to more than 300 E-Forms, including prescription assistance program forms for states and pharmacies. These forms are being used on the National Council on Aging (NCOA) and Benefits Check-up websites.

Program Eligibility

The Hawai'i Family Support 360 project is continuing to develop a "Benefits Finder" component that will assist consumers in determining whether they are likely to be eligible for state and county services. There are 91 programs that have been identified for inclusion in the matrix, with approximately 20 qualifying questions. Consumers are able to contact these service providers to make final determinations about eligibility.

Learn About

Consumers visiting the www.RealChoices site often need assistance in locating and learning about needed programs and related topics. In the “Learn About” section, visitors are presented with an easy-to-use table-of-contents-style directory of information. The visitor can select a topic of interest and can then “drill down” into the content and extract the level of detail required for their personal needs. Figure 2 below is a snapshot of the home page for “Learn About.” It provides information about various life issues for individuals of all ages with disabilities and long-term care needs. There are nine life domains or topic areas in this section of the website, which were identified by stakeholders as areas of significant interest. They include: education, employment, housing, transportation, civil rights, financial benefits, health, assistive technology, and community life. There are more than 1,500 links to national and statewide sites and 300 pages of content in “Learn About,” which allows visitors to make well-informed choices at a convenient time and place. “Learn About” is continually being reviewed and revised for broken or changed links and updated with current content.

Figure 2



Service Providers

The *Real Choices* Hawai'i website provides a searchable database of over 150,000 service providers throughout the nation. From the "Services" home page one can find a business or organization by alphabetical listing, keywords or phrases, geographic area/zip code or service category. This page also offers access to featured services and products, which include E-Forms.

The results of a search provide a listing of service providers that fit the parameters specified. With the exception of an alphabetical listing, the search will render the number of agencies found and allow the user to easily search for related "Learn About" topics. All service provider searches offer information about the organization with links to its website (if available). Once connected to the business, more in-depth information can be accessed through "Organization" information and the "Products and Services" page, which provides businesses with an opportunity to broadcast openings in programs or existing products. Any user can view service provider ratings submitted by other users in the "View Feedback" section, where any registered person can input their own feedback about services received. Because one must be a registered user to input feedback to a service provided, all ratings are reviewed to ensure that there is only one rating per individual. All of these features are found on the accessible right navigation bar.

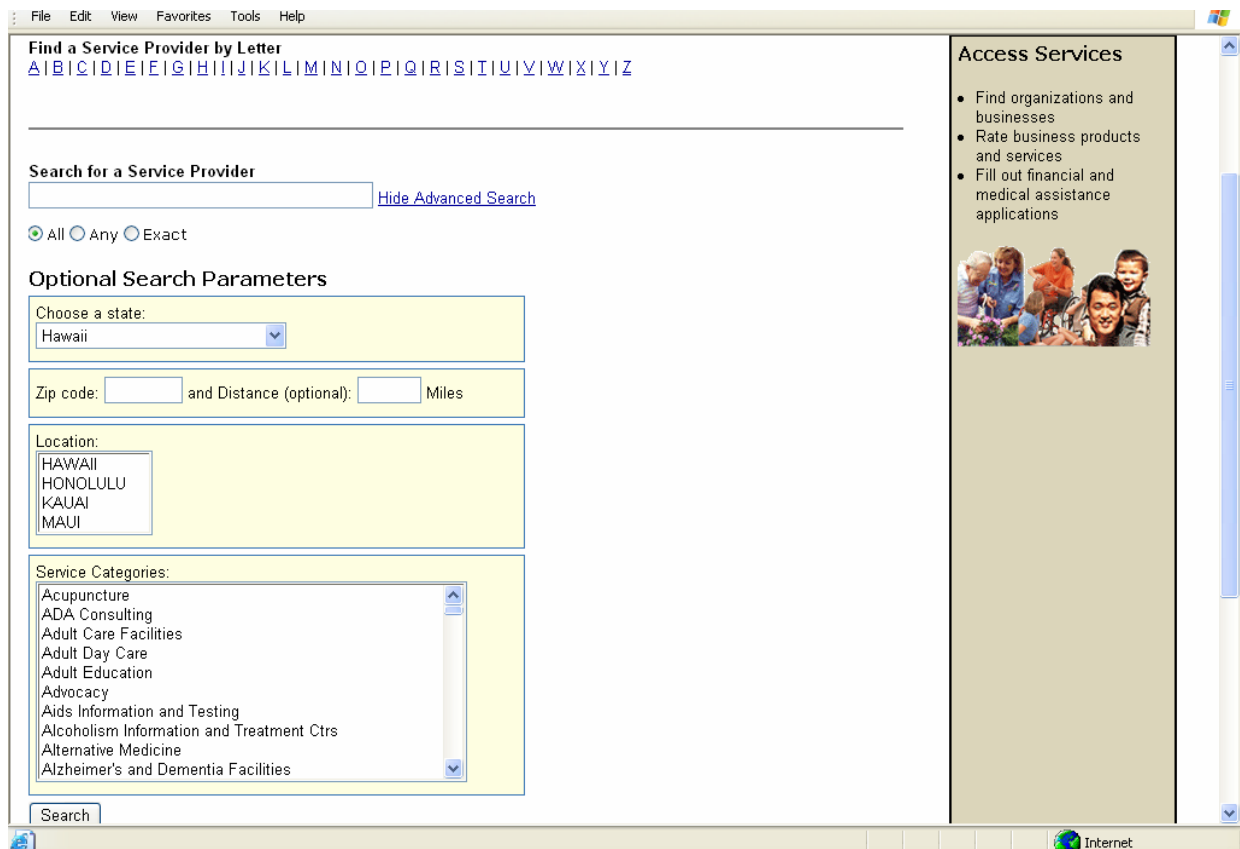
As a registered business or organization, the agency benefits from free *Real Choices* features including:

- Free advertising
- Reach an unlimited number of consumers, anytime, anywhere
- Describe and offer services online
- Identify keywords that allow individuals to find the agency easily
- Interact with individuals and assess their needs instantaneously
- Receive regular reminders to update agency information online
- Interact with other professionals in this universal online community.

Individuals can use the Service pages of www.RealChoices.org to:

- Investigate alternatives for disability or long-term care services and benefits
- Find and interact with service providers
- Register for services with providers

Figure 3



Advertising and Promotion

The Internet has been the primary venue used to advertise and promote the *Real Choices* website. Focus was given to national e-newsletters, including those that focused on issues in the “Learn About” content areas. An electronic newsletter called “Real People, Real Opportunities” (www.RealChoices.org) highlighted different aspects of the site, including a section entitled “What’s New.” The e-newsletter was distributed to 1,800 consumers and agency personnel bi-annually. Additionally, short updates were developed and sent via e-mail to Governing Council members who were asked to distribute the information throughout their agencies. Staff from the project made presentations to consumers, agency personnel, trade associations, and at state and national conferences. During the span of the project, more than 100 presentations about the site and its features were made to more than 3,200 people.

The project created promotional materials and gift items that publicized the services offered online, such as mouse pads and bookmarks with website information.

More than 3,500 mouse pads and collateral materials were given to various stakeholders attending presentations.

The power of the Internet is illustrated in the usage statistics of the *Real Choices* website, which has had more than 300,000 visitors since inception, with an ever growing increase of users each month. More statistics about usage can be found in Tables 1-4 below.

Program Results

Hawai`i has employed a continuous evaluation process in the development and implementation of this project to assure sustainability and continued use by stakeholders. The Governing Council and workgroups served as a review board for evaluating and managing progress in the development and implementation of the site. More than 60 meetings were conducted to ensure user-friendliness, accessibility, and content relevance. As a result, numerous upgrades, improvements and 15 new functions that were not originally in the "Use Case" plan of action were added to the website. Ultimately, the measure of success is based upon the use of the website, the number of visitors, the number of repeat visitors, etc.

To illustrate the capacity and success of the *Real Choices* website, and the ability it provides users to mine data, usage statistics for two one-stop resource centers are provided below (for a six month period spanning June 2005 through December 2005). Data categorized under "RCA" reflect traffic observed at www.RealChoices.org (Hawaii). Usage statistics are also provided for a website that is Louisiana's version of the *Real Choices* site, which is noted as "LA" on the Table (www.laanswers.com). During this six month period, RCA supported approximately 84 thousand visitor sessions and LA approximately 19 thousand (Traffic for both sites is increasing daily). Interestingly, while 60 percent of traffic normally occurs during work hours and averages 15 minutes, the peak hour for maximum traffic for the day is typically between 7 PM and 8 PM.

The following statistics represent the percentage of total page views of the resource center by each designated service. Only significant areas of traffic (i.e., greater than 1 percent) are listed, thus the totals will not be 100 percent.

Table 1: Most Frequently Accessed Pages

<u>Access By Major Service Area</u>	<u>RCA (550K)</u>	<u>LA (65K)</u>
Home	33.18%	6.02%
Provider	20.36%	11.04%
Forms	13.58%	N/A
Learn About	10.38%	30.28%
Services	3.23%	3.42%
Search	2.19%	5.95%
Assess Needs	N/A	1.66%
Login	1.35%	2.43%
Forums	1.07%	5.10%
Help	1.02%	3.60%
Community	0.67%	2.64%

Table 2: Access of Provider Information Services

<u>Access of Provider Info Services</u>	<u>RCA (110K)</u>	<u>LA (7K)</u>
Main provider information	67.65%	71.65%
Feedback	14.20%	6.70%
Other provider information	9.00%	1.23%
List of providers	5.34%	9.63%
Provider products and services list	2.39%	5.60%

Table 3: Access of “Learn About” Service Domains

<u>Access of Learn About Services</u>	<u>RCA (20K)</u>	<u>LA (20K)</u>
Community Life	21.16%	3.82%
Health	12.82%	19.32%
Education	11.58%	11.45%
Civil Rights	11.17%	15.09%
Transportation	10.24%	5.66%
Employment	9.96%	10.97%
Housing	9.21%	16.93%
Financial Benefits	9.15%	8.21%
Assistive Technology	4.27%	8.55%

Some of the most popular phrases searched include: employment services, adult day care, long-term care, food stamps, senior housing, case management, housing, home care, child care, section 8, Medicaid, nursing homes, seniornet, foster parent, meals for seniors, supported employment, child subsidy, and welfare.

In conjunction with this data, AssistGuide, Inc. was able to data mine information related to consumer usage from their site. The users of websites are largely anonymous. Generally, it has been proven counter-productive to force users to complete a survey to collect information prior to or during use. However, because some of the resource center’s functions collect demographic information as a natural by-product (such as, electronic application forms) it is possible to at least explore that information to gain insight into this important dimension of system use.

The following information summarizes the data provided by more than 18 thousand users of AssistGuide services. Since not all services require all users to provide a common set of information, it’s difficult to draw conclusions from this information. In addition, while further analysis may prove useful, the following data does not assist in differentiating between professionals or caregivers and those who are actually applying for the care/program. It is reasonable to assume that a large portion of the data provided was actually entered by a professional or caregiver, rather than the individual seeking assistance.

Table 4: User Demographics

<u>Age</u>	Based on a sample size of 16,062 users that provided age data, approximately 1% are younger than 21 years old, 7% between 21 and 40, 37% between 40 and 65, and 55% older than 65.
<u>Gender</u>	Based on a sample size of 18,471 users, approximately 63% are female and 37% male.
<u>State</u>	Based on a sample size of 17,305 users that provided data about their state of residence, 50 states plus DC are represented. The top 5 states and their percentages are: HI 22%, IL 13%, OH 11%, CA 6%, and NY 4%. The next five are WA, TX, FL, PA, and MI.
<u>Medicaid/Medicare</u>	Based on a sample size of 18,471 users, approximately 8% indicated they are currently receiving Medicaid and 55% indicated they are currently receiving Medicare.
<u>Income</u>	Based on a sample size of 525 users that provided income data, the income ranges from approximately 52% below 2005 Federal Poverty Level (2005FPL), to 38% greater than 2005FPL and less than 2X 2005FPL, to 10% greater than 2X 2005FPL. (Assuming single family member in continental U.S.)

Lessons Learned

Building a topic-specific comprehensive website presented many rewards and challenges. The *Real Choices* project was fortunate to have strong leadership on the Governing Council (GC) and Co-chairs from the Department of Human Services and the Hawai`i Center on Disability Studies. Leadership from the two sectors was beneficial when discussions got heated, consensus waned due to diversity, and individuals lost sight of the project goals. Examples of issues that benefited from multi-perspective inputs included discussions on the digital divide and the value of providing consumers with computers, or whether to adopt emerging technologies that would improve access to the website (e.g., enabling blind users to access the website using cell phones). Trying to meet the needs of everyone, and keeping abreast of changing technologies are issues that will continue to arise in any project. The chairs of the GC were critical in bridging turf issues and keeping the members on target with project goals.

A great dependence was placed on the Governing Council when the project needed to move beyond the core team. The GC played a significant role in getting support and participation from all agencies in the city, county, and/or state. Accurate information is critical to the success of a website and that information is best represented by the agency, business or organization that is providing the service. Hawai`i, through key GC members and the implementation of the Hawai`i Olmstead Plan, is continuing to

encourage agencies to list and update their information on *Real Choices*. While the option existed for the project to initially manage and approve service provider data submitted to the website, as stated previously, the GC opted for open enrollment. This has provided our community with a vast array of choices available not only in Hawai`i, but also throughout the United States. Additionally, the public/private partnership significantly enhanced the project through the contribution of an extensive database of local and national service provider information, which gave our site immediate credibility.

Hawai`i's *Real Choices* website is a project that provides a model for successful collaboration and partnering between a broad spectrum of stakeholders: consumers, service providers, grant-funded state-entities, and for-profit businesses. The final product of this cooperative effort reflects the specific preferences and needs of its users. It provides a "living" resource that addresses consumers' information needs in a way that has been directed by the users themselves and it serves as a platform for consumers to develop a community-based forum for communication with other consumers and with providers of services.

As an island, Hawai`i is dependent upon its neighbors, much in the same way as holds true for rural areas. The usage statistics presented for *Real Choices* help to demonstrate the success and need for a one-stop resource center that provides valuable information to people of all ages with disabilities, challenges and long-term care needs in our communities. Additionally, it demonstrates the need for a collection of national information, in one place, which can be accessed from home or work, and that can assist individuals in making well-considered decisions. This is demonstrated in *Table 2*, which shows that only 22 percent of total users of *Real Choices* are living in Hawai`i. For example, someone from Hawai`i may need health care information for a relative in California. Taking the broad approach has been beneficial for the project from two perspectives: first we have a high volume of visitors ranking www.RealChoices.org in the top 1 percent of websites visited nationally, and the scope of the project was expanded to the possibilities of replication for sustainability.

This project is sustained through a strong commitment by public agencies, providers and consumers. Each entity has both incentives and ownership in the project, which helps to maintain this commitment. The website has become a means by which Systems Change has been streamlined through the use of advanced technologies applied in ways that provide meaningful outcomes for participants.

Replication Requirements

Sustainability of the project was addressed from the onset. When negotiating with our private partner, discussions occurred as to responsibilities of parties both in the development and maintenance of the site. Based on focus groups we knew our community wanted a broad array of information that applied to all aspects of their lives. The development of "Learn About" involved nine full and part-time staff members

working thousands of hours. Critical decisions were made to determine if the content was enduring, the site accessed was stable, the information was reliable and that descriptions on the site were written in simple language (8th grade or lower). Mapping and cross-coordinating information between domains was required. Finally, it was apparent that a split needed to be made in the presentation on the site regarding national versus local information. This demarcation has allowed the *Real Choices* website to be replicated with relative ease by other states and counties.

The benefits of replicating and customizing the *Real Choices* website are numerous. The robust “Learn About” section of more than 1,500 links to national resources and the board database (if chosen) of service provider information gives the website provider the ability to “go-live” with a robust website that has a customized look and a feel that represents their community. Entities that wish to replicate the *Real Choices* sites have the option of using the Hawai`i local resources as a template for their local information. As more states and counties choose to use the *Real Choices* site as their foundation, economy of scales prevail. Hawai`i is now benefiting from features developed by Louisiana and South Carolina. These are functions that were initially desired, but were financially prohibitive at the time of development. Once deployed on sister-sites, others have a choice to adopt the new function.

Conclusions

The www.RealChoices.org one-stop resource center serves as a foundation for providing a comprehensive, seamless information system for consumers, service professionals, public agencies and employers statewide. The innovative website allows consumers to communicate with service providers, is the largest single entry point system that addresses the needs of individuals with disabilities and long-term care needs, and can be customized and replicated to meet the needs of every community.

The success and sustainability of the *Real Choices* project result from high levels of commitment by all participants and an open-door approach to accepting input from all involved. From its inception, the *Real Choices* website was created through a carefully planned process that allowed for expansion and adaptability as stakeholders’ goals and needs changed over time. The website continues to operate and evolve to meet the requirements of its users and contributors.

Useful Resources

<http://www.assistguide.com>

Acknowledgements

Mahalo nui loa to the following groups of individuals who made this a successful endeavor: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services for the opportunity to develop and implement the Real Choices project; the participants with disabilities who provided their expertise and time to help create the virtual one-stop system; the Hawai`i *Real Choices* Governing Council members and their affiliations for their dedication to the project; AssistGuide, Inc. for their contributions both professionally and in-kind donations that allowed the project to warp to an advanced level; and the *Real Choices* Team whose commitment allowed the project to “stretch” to meet the needs of the community.